

Cinema Canada

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THE DESTRUCTION OF JOHN GRIERSON

A synopsis of JOHN GRIERSON's activities, according to [redacted], is as follows:

GRIERSON was the Director of the National Film Board of Canada since its inception in 1938 until W.W. II. During the war the Canadian Government expelled GRIERSON for Communist activities and he proceeded to New York where he organized a

- 2 -

Special dossier on the Canadian Film Industry, 1939-53, compiled by guest editor Peter Morris for the Film Studies Association of Canada in conjunction with Cinema Canada

CANADIAN FILM
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DE CINÉMA-TÉLÉVISION



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SPEAKING UP FOR THE CANADIAN FILM INDUSTRY

Telegram to:

The Hon. David MacDonald M.P.
Secretary of State and
Minister of Communications,
House of Commons, Ottawa.

A unique opportunity now exists to free enterprise and initiative in the film and television industry in Canada through cultural and communications policy measures. Canadian talent and creativity will be stimulated by your decisions of the next few months, or, as in the past, will drift away in search of appreciation elsewhere. There is no better way to bring this country together than by exposing Canadian audiences to the very best of Canadian artistic and cultural expression. Performers need access to their public. Give excellence a chance to surface.

To this end, we urge immediate consideration of the following policy proposals:

1. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is our central cultural institution. Make it the showplace of Canada by encouraging creative competition in talent and ideas. The surest way to effect this is to put teeth into Al Johnson's commitment "to increase the use of independent production companies and of Canadian feature films over the next few years." CRTC endorses this strategy. Set an immediate quota of \$50 million rising to 30 percent of programming funds during this license period for acquisition of quality independently produced programs.
2. The National Film Board is failing. Reconstitute it as a graduate film school and funding source for excellence and innovation open to all. Institute a policy that all film and audio-video work sponsored by government departments be produced by outside companies, as is the practice with the bulk of all other government contracting. Suggest major (and long overdue) review of National Film Act to reflect these policies.
3. Capital Cost Allowance regulations are producing a surge in feature film activity. To ensure development of Canadian subjects, expand provisions to include tax deferral re: bona fide script and development investment, allow two-year production schedule for principal photography and adapt regulations for greater applicability to television series, educational and other audio-video production.
4. We heartily endorse and encourage policy direction recently adopted by the Canadian Film Development Corporation away from equity financing into script development, packaging and bridge-financing with private sector sharing risks.
5. We endorse your wish to license Pay Television in Canada given involvement by independent producers in the shaping of this policy to ensure Canadian talent is a major beneficiary.
6. We recommend examination of a 'blocked funds' diversion policy in lieu of withholding tax at the distributor level (rather than a quota or levy) for entertainment film rentals allowing such monies to be reinvested in Canadian productions of the distributors' choice.

These six policy initiatives are intended to minimize governmental interference, render efficient those governmental financial support systems that are needed, open up bureaucratized public sector operations to genuine creative competition, spread risks with the private sector, increase jobs, expand exports and permit the arts to grow — and hence become more self-sufficient.

CFTA is the representative voice of the independent sector of the film and television industry in Canada. We urge an early meeting with our Association and with our colleagues in L'association des producteurs du film de Quebec to discuss the above agenda.

Passed by the Board of Directors, Canadian Film and Television Association, 7th June, 1979.

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CONTENTS

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Cover: The Freedom of Information Act in the USA allowed Kirwan Cox to request the Grierson files from the F.B.I. As is obvious from the cover document, the information was not all that free after all. Cox pieces together the trials which Grierson suffered after he left Canada (see p.16) while members of the Film Studies Association of Canada fill in other areas to round out its resumé of film activity in Canada from 1939-53.

Charlotte Hussey	4	Spotlight on Eunice Macauley and John Weldon
Peter Morris	10	Objects of History: an introduction
Gary Evans	12	The Politics of Propaganda: John Grierson
Kirwan Cox	16	The Grierson Files
Piers Handling	25	Censorship and Scares: The National Film Board of Canada: 1940-52
	32	The First Canadian Film Awards
Maynard Collins	34	Cooperation, Hollywood and Howe
	37	A View from the Top: Arthur Irwin
Pierre Véronneau	42	The First Wave: Quebec's feature films 1944-53
Kirwan Cox	47	Canada's Theatrical Wars: the indies vs. the chains
	54	Tech News: Camera Type Telecines by Rodger J. Ross
	56	Film Reviews Riel/ Alastair Brown

Cinema Canada would like to take this opportunity to thank the Film Studies Association of Canada, Peter Morris and Kirwan Cox for the research and work which has gone into this issue.

We believe that it will prove invaluable, both to students of film and to those interested in Canadian studies.

We remind professors and others that photocopying any part of Cinema Canada is illegal and encourage all to take advantage of our bulk price to buy issues for classes and study groups. Groups from 5 to 25 people can purchase copies for \$1.00 each. Larger groups should contact the office for a special group rate.

SPOT LIGHT... On

by Charlotte Hussey

Eunice Macaulay and John Weldon



Celebrating their Academy Award triumph NFB animators John Weldon and Eunice Macaulay show off their pair of Oscars, fondly referred to as Salt and Pepper photo: John Goddard

Even in conversation, Oscar-award-winning National Film Board animators John Weldon and Eunice Macaulay work as a team. Criss-crossing back and forth in their shared explana-

tion of why their seven-minute comedy *Special Delivery* won in the best animated short category at the 1979 Academy Awards, pausing for one another to add the appropriate auto-

biographical nuance or to pick up the train of thought, both possess what it takes to be successful animators: a fine sense of timing that accompanies their differing and yet compatible

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- Taylor/Drabinsky into TV
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senses of humor.

Eunice's humor is laconic and matter of fact in tone. "If everything goes right with a film, nobody notices me," is typical of her understated style. Speaking quietly and with a slight British accent, she is a shortish woman whose curly gray-brown hair softens her aquiline features and encircles her open and often bemused face. Her whole air is one of a quiet strength and that of a person who talks little about herself.

When asked "What are your most important assets as filmmakers," Eunice's immediate response was, "Everything John does is humorous and I hope it always will be. People need to be entertained." This was said, not in a self-effacing manner, but in one that showed her enthusiasm for and genuine interest in her colleague. Throughout the interview, Eunice would often respond to questions in terms of John Weldon, giving information about him or questioning him in such a way that he would start talking himself, all of which suggests that she has a genius for catalyzing others and facilitating the use of their gifts and capacities in the group efforts necessary to produce animated films.

When that roguish twinkle appears in his eyes, John Weldon is about to start on one of his many humorous anecdotes such as when, a few weeks ago, he fell asleep on the air during a CBC radio interview just after having received the Oscar. He goes on loquaciously to add that he plans to keep Oscar, whose build is impressive, hidden under his bed to be used on any burglar that might try to break into his home. Dressed casually in a plaid sports shirt slightly rumpled at the waist,

John has medium length, reddish brown hair that merges into his somewhat uneven beard of the same color. Puckish, slightly cynical, witty and quick, he has the ability to make people feel immediately at ease through his sense of humor. A humor which, when Eunice was asked to describe it, was hesitatingly defined by her as "intelligent." John fielded the question himself by way of a quick story about how the NFB recently tried to describe each of its animator's sense of humor by saying so-and-so's is "sweet," somebody else's is "goofy," and another's is "macabre," so that when a certain flavor is needed, it can be ordered up like Laura Secord ice cream. One is left, understandably, with the impression that John would prefer that the range of his humor not be reduced to the width of a single adjective.

Working as a team on *Special Delivery*, Weldon and Macaulay revel in the fact that they are both iconoclasts who share one and the same secret to success: neither formally studied art before becoming an animator. John says, "I attribute my success to never having been to art school and never having learned to draw." Thirty-three-year-old Montrealer Weldon took a degree in psychology from McGill and then went on to attend MacDonald College for teacher training. He spent one year as an actuarial trainee in the insurance business and then in 1969 quit to write and draw a comic book entitled "Pipkin Papers," a venture lasting only one issue. "I had been interested in still cartoons, and after the comic book I tried a small animated film. Then I went down to the Film Board to see if I could get

something, and they were hiring inkers and I got a job as a free-lancer." John moved from a free-lance to full-time member of the NFB's animation department where he has worked in various capacities on over 20 films. In 1977 his film *Spinnolio* won an Etrog at the Canadian Film Awards for the best animation; and the Oscar winning *Special Delivery* was awarded first prize this year at the Zagreb International Animation Festival in Yugoslavia, a festival John loves because "the whole country is involved" and "animated shorts there are like hockey is here" — the national obsession.

John has just completed *The Log Driver's Waltz* for the NFB's Canadian Vignettes program. It is based on a folk song sung by the McGarrigle sisters. Liking the challenge of "something different each time," he is presently "doing a half-hour TV film with Robert Awad that has live action and animated segments."

NFB animation supervisor Macaulay has worn many hats; she served four years in the British navy and worked as both an analytical chemist and radio technician. She became an animator when she landed a job in 1947 at Gaumont British Animation "just by chance." When GBA closed, she worked as an embroidery designer and as an electrical design draftsman, and free-lanced in collaboration with her animator husband in the fields of film and TV, exhibition design, and visual aids. In 1961 they moved to New York and then in 1963 to Canada where for the next six years she brought up their two children and did occasional film work. "I worked as an animation supervisor for Potterton Productions, starting in 1969 in Montreal," adds Eunice who moved to the NFB in 1973 where she has participated in every animation production that the Board has done since that time. Here the fifty-five-year-old animator works on color designs and production, supervises the tracers and painters, does backgrounds and checks every frame for final approval.

With the Oscar winning *Special Delivery*, "each frame had to be drawn" and this involved some 5,000 individual drawings. John and Eunice worked with a story line that sprang from what John claims was a "subconscious association" that he made between his own unshoveled sidewalk and that of his parent's which he had neglected to shovel when he was 17. Staring at his own front steps buried under weeks of drifting snow, he began to daydream and remembered that his family had received a stern letter from the Post



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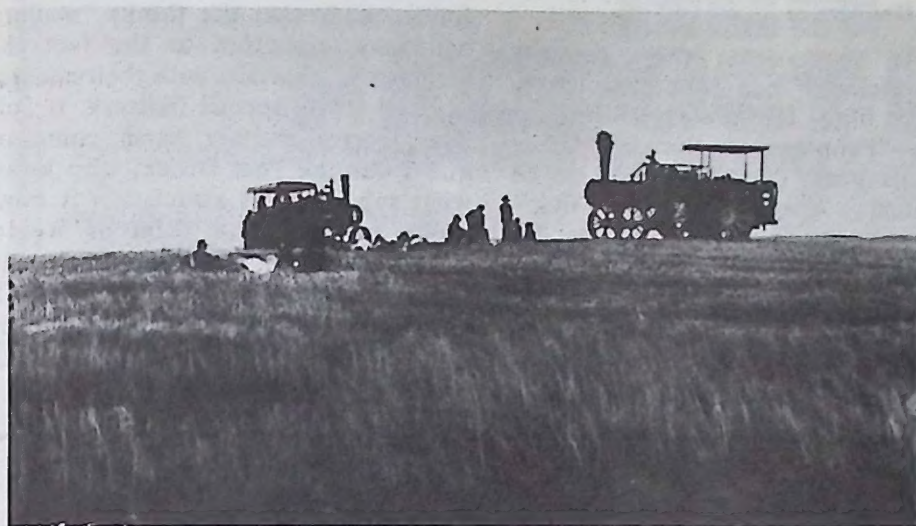
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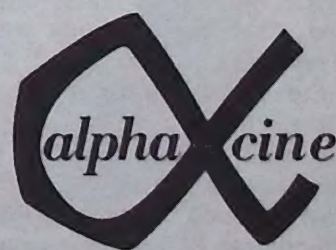
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Office warning them of all the terrible things that could happen if they didn't shovel off their sidewalk. "I began telling Eunice about this, thinking about what could happen, and she started adding more horrible twists." Originally they thought they had a short story on their hands but soon realized that it was growing into a film idea, and so they "took it down to the program committee." "And," adds Eunice, "they received it with great delight."

The story line tells how a gentle homeowner is asked by his wife — as she leaves for her evening karate class — to shovel off the sidewalk. He goes out himself and then returns to find the body of a mailman who has broken his neck on the icy front steps. There are many surprising developments in the film's short 7-minutes as the panicked homeowner struggles to conceal the body of the defunct mailman who was, unbeknownst to him, his wife's lover.

Once they had the plot, "it didn't evolve that much during the year it took to produce the film, but what did evolve was "the technical conception" from a plan to "do cut-outs and animation" to animation with hand-drawn backgrounds. This resulted in pastel gray backgrounds that are as fluid as the characters, allowing the audience to rapidly move from inside houses and structures to outside spaces and back again with hardly a break. Flipping through sheets of paper, each containing a carefully drawn cell, John made a blue figure run around a corner to demonstrate how such fluidity was achieved with the drawings themselves and not by changing camera angles.

While in Los Angeles for the Academy Awards, the two filmmakers had a chance to visit the Disney Studios. Both chuckled at the ironic name of Disney's animation head, Donald Duckwald, who treated the two Oscar winners like royalty spending the whole day showing them around the clinically antiseptic studios where "each room looks alike." They "didn't see any people around" and, as Eunice observed, there was "one pencil laid at right angles to each desk." John added, "I wish somebody would clean up my office like that!" Everything on the Disney walls "is framed" in contrast to an NFB bulletin board on a wall directly behind John and Eunice that is bursting with a rich clutter of clipped cartoons, notices and multi-colored film announcements.

Many of the Disney animators that John and Eunice talked with "wondered why they couldn't do animated shorts" such as *Special Delivery* but instead

are confined to doing longer films that involve large group efforts. Individuals have little to say about the film's direction. John said that "It looks like the 27-minute, animated film for television will overwhelm the shorter cartoon, and this is sad. It takes animation beyond the range of just using a few individuals, where it is a really personal thing, and forces you to use 20 to 30 people." This is too bad for in such films there is a "loss of the individual spark" that was possible on a 1-3 person film such as *Special Delivery*.

When asked why they thought *Special Delivery* beat out two longer animated films for the Oscar, Eunice replied, "People were looking for a laugh this year. People still like to be entertained. Apart from the film's merits as a hand-drawn film, it did entertain people." Both feel that with the state of affairs at present in the world, people desperately need to laugh and not take themselves so seriously.

John continued, "We were asked a lot of serious questions in Zagreb about whether the film had a message... What we did was to make messages up after the film was done."

If anyone is to find a message in their film, it might be a postman. But John and Eunice have not as yet arranged a special screening of *Special Delivery* for mailmen. John, a past recipient of severe communiques from the Post Office, says that "I keep waiting for a nasty letter from them accusing us of maligning mailmen." Eunice adds that she thinks "mailmen will take exception to the fact that mailmen have affairs with their clients," as they do in *Special Delivery*. If John does receive another harsh communiqué from the Post Office, who knows what subconscious association it might evoke or what the team of Weldon and Macaulay would come up with then? Perhaps yet another pair of Oscars to add to their present pair that are fondly called Salt and Pepper? □

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introduction

objects of history

by peter morris

"If men do not make history, they tend increasingly to become utensils of history-makers as well as the mere objects of history."

— C. Wright Mills,
Power, Politics, People

This special edition of *Cinema Canada* has been prepared to complement and supplement the release of *Has Anybody Here Seen Canada?*, a survey of Canadian cinema from the founding of the National Film Board in 1939 to the beginnings of television.

Blaire Fraser characterized these years in Canada as "The Search for Identity" in his book of the same title. Canada, he said, had both new confidence and new doubts "about her true identity as a nation". From a different perspective, Donald Creighton argued the same point in *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957*. In these years, "Canada made a number of crucial decisions about its direction. It chose one fork of the road to the future; and the Canada we inhabit today is, for both good and ill, very largely the result of that decisive choice." For both authors the economic and cultural decisions related to (as Blaire Fraser put it) "the tremendous gravitational force across the nation's southern border... (that left Canada) at least half absorbed before anyone on either side of the border quite realized it." Fraser's metaphors of "gravitation" and "Continental osmosis" imply the workings of natural (and hence irresistible) forces. Creighton sees that "half absorption" as the result of conscious political choices: "The independence of Canada, economic, political, or cultural... had never worried either Louis St. Laurent or C.D. Howe."

The Canadian cinema also faced its forked roads. Choices existed and



Grierson's influence was felt, not only in production, but in promotion and distribution, as he became the dominate force in Canadian films of the early forties

decisions were made that affected the kind of film industry we have today. Indeed, it is difficult not to be struck by the parallels between events in the Forties and in the Seventies. It is all there: the struggles to establish a stable feature film industry, commercial film industry attacks on the NFB, government policies designed more to still stormy waters than to solve problems, independent theatres trying to beat down the chains. Is it true, as Budge Crawley recently claimed, that Canada "wasn't ready" to make features in the Forties? This argument implies that producing features requires a certain level of maturity that Canadians didn't have – though Americans, of course, did. Maynard Collins' article in this issue – and that by Pierre Véronneau on Quebec production – suggest that there were many more factors involved in the Forties than simple lack of maturity. The Liberal government chose one of those forked roads when it decided to back the Canadian Co-operation Project rather than follow the advice of its own Film Commissioner, Ross McLean, and work towards the establishment of a viable feature film industry. And, as Kirwan Cox points out, the exhibition side of the industry had its own impact on the face of Canadian cinema. It will surprise many to discover, for example, that Odeon at one time argued in favour of a quota – when its own self interest encouraged this approach.

On the other hand, it will surprise no one to learn that during this period the National Film Board quickly became the predominant force in Canadian film. And Canadian commercial producers were to argue that this dominance was itself part of the problem in developing a viable film industry. However valid their arguments may have been, the government chose yet another forked road when it decided to maintain the NFB despite both the Red Scare and the lobby to dissolve it. The interview with Arthur Irwin puts this period into context. Irwin also discusses the changes he introduced into the structure and operations of the Board – changes that were to have a lasting impact on the kind of organization the NFB became. In contrast to Irwin's 'organization man' approach stands John Grierson. Gary Evans neatly characterizes Grierson's politics as reflected in the films made

under his jurisdiction. Kirwan Cox's startling revelations of the FBI's hounding of John Grierson cast a whole new light on Grierson's post-Canada career. And Piers Handling puts the question of government film making in a wider context and raises the issue of political censorship and of the freedom of filmmakers working within a state institution. Grierson himself pointed to this issue in 1945 when he said: "Nothing can be expected from Governments beyond what I shall call the degree of general sanction. The degree of sanction by the party in power..."

The articles in this issue are far from the final word on this period. Not only does each raise issues that deserve further exploration but there are also whole areas of potential study not represented here. There is, for example, a real need for a re-evaluation of the films of the period, for a re-examination of the work of filmmakers whose contributions have been overshadowed by later developments. I am thinking here of such filmmakers as Don Mulholland, Bob Anderson, Evelyn Spice Cherry, Gudrun Bjerring Parker, Morten Parker and others. Production at the NFB following Grierson's departure and before the Unit B-Direct Cinema developments in the late Fifties is usually considered a rather boring interlude. Current investigations suggest this is far from true; that there was much of interest that relates to our developing understanding of the aesthetics of Canadian film and, indeed, to the origins of the Unit B-Direct Cinema style.

What is in these pages, then, is offered as a contribution to work that is continuing in many parts of the country and in the hopes that it will stimulate even more.

Peter Morris

"A slow sort of country," said the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that."

Lewis Carroll,
Alice Through the Looking Glass



contributors

Kirwan Cox is producer of *Has Anyone Here Seen Canada?* and is Chairman of the Council of Canadian Film Makers.

Maynard Collins was a researcher on *Has Anyone Here Seen Canada?* and is now Special Projects Officer for the Canada Council.

Gary Evans, a film historian and researcher, lives in Montreal and has written about Grierson and the documentary movement.

Piers Handling heads the publications section of the Canadian Film Institute, was director of research on *Has Anyone Here Seen Canada?*, and is the author of a recent book on Don Shebib.

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word of thanks...

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john grierson

the politics of propaganda

by gary evans



Stuart Legg and John Grierson were playing for high stakes against Nazi propaganda chief Goebbels

If John Grierson and the documentary film are nearly synonymous in the lexicon of film, few people realize how complex and totalitarian were the politics of propaganda which were intertwined in his philosophy. In this article we shall examine some major aspects of his thought and try to demonstrate how his philosophy was applied in the wartime context at the National Film Board of Canada.

When Grierson was a graduate student at the University of Chicago from 1924-27, the core of his philosophy crystallized as he rejected Walter Lippmann's pessimistic belief that in this century the few had to do the thinking for the many. Lippmann's pessimism stemmed from a belief that there was neither time nor adequate information for the citizens to make informed judgements. Grierson resisted this analysis and donned the cloak of the totalitarian propagandist. He claimed that education, which he equated with propaganda, was the tool to serve as the active instrument of the democratic idea,

operating "in the quiet light of ordinary humanism."

He believed the task of propaganda was to speak intimately and quietly about real things and real people. For the rest of his life he reiterated dogmatically the theme of propaganda, service and community: "We can, by propaganda, widen the horizons of the schoolroom and give to every individual, each in his place and work, a living conception of the community which he has the privilege to serve." Grierson's propaganda crusade though secular, had its roots at least partly in his Calvinist upbringing. "I derive my authority from Moses" he would say late in life. This attitude also allowed him to avoid partisan politics and to protect the documentary movement from partisan attack. To Grierson's political masters in Canada, he was a 'hot gosseller' who, while bolstering their wartime Government, would eventually fall victim to his own propaganda.

Grierson skirted political labels quite easily. With the world

at war in the early 1940's, he insisted that the State was the machinery by which the best interests of the people are secured. Simultaneously he denied the advent of socialism. "We are entering upon a new and interim society which is neither capitalist nor socialist but in which we can achieve central planning without loss of individual initiative, . . . in which public unity and discipline can be achieved without forgetting the humanitarian virtues..."

He was also careful to distinguish between being totalitarian for evil and totalitarian for good. As a practitioner of the good, he felt he was "serving the greatest mobilization of the public imagination since the Churches lost their grip." And one can discover in so many of Canada's wartime propaganda films an attempt to transmit comprehension of the dramatic patterns which were the backbone of society. Under Grierson's guidance, information became a two-way process between State and people, people and State. This activity, linked to a commitment to inspire rather than to preach, was no less than a war for men's minds.

The Canadian films were quite different from British film propaganda, produced in large part by the original documentary school Grierson had left in England. The British were concerned with local tactics of defensive warfare, reiterating themes from 'Britain can take it' to 'Britain can dish it out too' later in the war. Studiously avoiding any enunciation of war aims other than military victory (Churchill's orders), the films of the Ministry of Information were with few exceptions, flaccid endeavours.

The two theatrical film series (each released monthly) which emerged in Canada during the war were *Canada Carries On* and *The World In Action*. (The French versions were *En Avant Canada* and *Les Reportages*) These were group efforts, hence they lacked individual credits. The guiding hand behind the two Canadian series was Stuart Legg, one of the pioneers of the British documentary movement, who in the winter of 1939 had come to Canada to make two films for the Government Motion Picture Bureau. When Grierson became the first Film Commissioner of the National Film Board, he asked Legg to join him in organizing theatrical documentary production.

He and Grierson were in a deadly chess game with their nemesis, Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels, whose weekly theatrical newsreel, *Wochenschauen*, emphasized triumphant battle scenes and themes of inevitable victory, underscored by morale-building music. Legg and his team replied by cutting captured German footage and Allied footage into a monthly analysis of the larger strategic plans required to defeat German strategies of world conquest. The Canadian propaganda was heavily influenced by the techniques and rhythm of the widely popular American newsreel, *The March of Time*, though the depth of analysis far surpassed anything *The March of Time* had ever done.

Canada Carries On, begun in 1940, was made primarily for Canadian audiences. The series concentrated heavily upon themes of transport and communication. A continued emphasis on the need to integrate all national forces implied how Canada could be totalitarian for the good. With few exceptions these films avoided hate-mongering, parochialism and vilification of the enemy. They stressed the importance of a broad military strategy and described convincingly the tremendous power behind the nation's cooperative and corporate energies. An issue like *Inside Fighting Canada* enunciated the theme of building together for the future and called for a worldwide

faith in neighborliness. (Note the soft-core internationalism.) The film did not need to speak of victory, for the narrator stated dramatically that Canada had a secret weapon: the simple power of Canadians fighting of their own free will. (Conscription had not yet become necessary.) This inspiring phrase seemed to contain the essence of what Canada's free men and women were fighting for.

In 1941, *Churchill's Island* won the NFB's first Academy Award for best documentary film. Legg and his unit did not try to cover up the fact that battered Britain was on the defensive. If the film was a variation of the 'Britain can take it' theme, it was aggressive too. Germany had failed to reckon with the RAF above and the people's army below. Narrator Lorne Greene, now recognized as Canada's 'voice of democracy', concluded authoritatively that Britain had an inner strength, a stubborn calm which iron and steel and bombs could never pierce. His last words bravely flaunted the challenge, "Come—if you dare."

Another number, entitled *Women Are Warriors*, compared the important war work of women in England and Russia to that of Canada. Russia was prudently labeled a cooperative rather than communist state. It was asserted that Canada profited from these two allied examples. In an attempt to compliment Canadian women, the narration stated that the women of Canada had learned to turn the domestic needle and thread into the tools of war. Deftness learned at home in traditional women's roles had come to serve them well in the war industry. Reminiscent of early Soviet techniques of montage, the film employed superb editing to create a fast tempo. At one point the film cut three times from shots of factory to plane to factory in order to demonstrate how important woman's supportive role was to the war effort.

The World In Action series, started in June, 1942, reached out to a wider audience and had two main goals: first, to relate local strategies to world ones and second, to influence and direct the political attitudes of North American audiences toward an internationally oriented postwar ethic. Again, the series avoided partisan politics and concentrated upon inspiration. *The New York Times* praised these films which attempted to give the people great hope and faith in themselves and, in a brave new world. The secret of success, said the *Times*, was that the editorial sights of the series' subjects were raised high above the level of nationalism.

Our Northern Neighbor exemplified this approach by its attempt to portray Russia fairly. The film provided an historical overview of Russia and characteristically, never once used the word communism. The commentary suggested that Joseph Stalin, a quieter voice than Trotsky, was leading Russia to build a pattern of socialism for all the world to see. The Russian citizen was preparing for the promise of ultimate freedom and good living after all these lean years. The film ended with the internationalist message, "We seek the cooperation of all nations, large and small, to eliminate tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance."

One of Grierson's favourite films of the series was *The War For Men's Minds*, which he called a film on the Lincoln theme: "When the common people rise to find their liberty, not the gates of hell will prevail against them." Prime Minister King ought to have been pleased by the film, especially when he and Roosevelt were linked as the two voices of North American leadership. The film described the war as a gigantic mobilization for men's minds through the media of propaganda: press,

motion picture, and radio. The spiritual defeat of Germany had already been accomplished. The aftermath of war was not to be punishment and/or isolation, but brotherhood. It concluded heroically that the people came first, the people came before all.

Grierson and Legg spent the war years encouraging the NFB staff to make films to develop national unity and to describe war activities and related themes, all to prepare the peace. Unlike the Germans, who believed that war made splendid propaganda, Grierson had long been committed to the Bertrand Russell maxim that peace should be made as exciting as war. As Grierson put it bluntly but privately in 1943, "I confess I can't ever get very excited about the war effort *per se* and feel that any information regarding it must somehow try to get behind the shot and shell. The surface values—the guns and the campaigns and the braveries and the assembly lines and the sacrifices—are, I think, taken by themselves the greatest bore on earth . . ." Grierson had turned his eyes to peacetime information. He hoped to get relevant Government departments behind such concrete themes as conservation, nutrition, and people as producers and consumers, so that all the information would be tied to common ends. He foresaw in this organization more a Ministry of Education than anything else.

Here again we see how Grierson's philosophy of education/propaganda was to be harnessed to the machinery of state to create a totalitarian world for the good. Under the spell of his own propaganda, he believed that all this was leading to a new kind of democracy. "The essence of the educational process has been taken over by governments and industry in the name of propaganda . . . One might say that we had removed the Church influence from education only to hand it to the bureaucrats of public and private enterprise." He believed that it was his duty to prepare the public to recognize that total civilian effort and Government initiative were to become a permanent feature of twentieth century life.

To this end Grierson had already encouraged the establishment of non-theatrical circuits across Canada. Under the able direction of Donald Buchanan, the Central Government Distribution Service had expanded the non-theatrical distribution system to some 43 travelling circuits, serving up to one quarter of a million viewers per month by mid-1942. Each circuit reached 20 rural communities per month and returned the same day each month. Some of the films contained discussion trailers which suggested how the audience could follow up some of the themes articulated in the films. One field representative gave a typical report of the audience discussion when a half dozen local citizens took the platform with him during a half-hour intermission to have a round table discussion. "Criticism was not lacking," he admitted, "but was usually quite intelligent and the discussions always took a decidedly positive direction. Very constructive consideration of social issues came to the fore." The importance of these in-field reports should not be missed, for they allowed Grierson and his staff to keep their fingers on the pulse of public opinion and to measure, in part, the effect of the NFB's propaganda.

Along the same lines, the NFB tried to integrate film as part of the branch activity of the trade union movement. The National Trade Union film circuit was sponsored by the Canadian Congress of Labour, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, the Workers' Educational Association and the National Film Board. From September to May, monthly

showings were held in union halls across the country. Film themes included subjects on unemployment, recreational programmes, rehabilitation, labour management committees and international relations. Films were woven into the normal pattern of union educational work as was the technique of discussion shows. From this came production of specific discussion trailers in which ordinary trade unionists gave their point of view on the main film and often involved the audience by stimulating controversy.

There were also the non-theatrical industrial films, geared both to the needs of the war and to describing the growth of Canadian industries and the development of the nation's natural resources. The programme was inaugurated in January 1943 to provide one show a month for eleven months. Showings were held in the plants, partly on company time, partly on lunch breaks and/or between work shifts. It was estimated that these films reached an annual audience of 400,000.

Community or ethnographic films were another genre of film which did much to bridge the barriers between various cultural groups comprising the Canadian mosaic. The "Peoples of Canada" series, made from 1941-43, portrayed major ethnic groups at work building the nation, and at play. Glimpses of Indian, Eskimo, Polish, Scottish, and Ukrainian communities went far in interpreting Canada to Canadians and in encouraging respect and toleration for others.

Another non-theatrical sphere was exploited with the establishment of the Volunteer Projection Services. Here films were made available to interested groups such as Junior Boards of Trade, Chambers of Commerce, Public Libraries, Youth, Women's and Church groups, all of whom sponsored film series. By the end of the war, the non-theatrical audience in Canada was about one million.

In addition to the above outlets, there was an attempt to exploit the newsreel as an effective tool of communication. Three series, *Eyes Front*, *Canada Communiqué* and *Pictorial Hometown News* were developed for troops overseas; *Eyes Front* was also for training camps at home. There were, in addition, four other series developed for rural and industrial non-theatrical circuits: *Rural Newsreel*, *Industrial Newsreel*, *Front Line Reports* and *Screen Magazine*.

All of this was remarkable because rural and working class Canada were not just simply linked to global events; the people were learning by viewing and discussing films. This was a way of making citizens part of the active democratic process. Grierson's idea of totalitarian propaganda, this two way communication between the governing and the governed, was an application of what Marshall McLuhan would later call the 'global village' concept. Film, education, and discussion linked the human-ness and one-ness of the individual human being in his own environment with the world as a whole.

Looking at film propaganda and information in total, (Grierson had become head of the Wartime Information Board in 1943) Prime Minister King and his Government may have been convinced that what Grierson was doing was worthwhile in the context of the war. Besides, the Prime Minister was benefitting from frequent publicity which disguised his usual awkward manner before the public—Opposition critics had complained that images of King in Government propaganda were as numerous as the posterity of Abraham! More likely, the King Government was too busy to devote time or interest



Observing the shoot from one of four sets was part of the crew on *How's the War News*: Alfred Jacquemin, camera; Fred Govan, grip; Gordon Sparling, director; Miss Boulkind, script girl and Phil Taylor, assistant director

to information policy. In fact, it was amazing what the NFB got away with, Stuart Legg admitted years later.

The internationalism of Film Board propaganda would, by war's end and in the wake of the infamous Gouzenko spy scandal and Royal Commission, be inconsistent with the Government's position to align itself with the United States' postwar foreign policy. The so-called internationalist position which Canada adopted was displayed in its support of the United Nations. The U.N., however, was to become an international forum from which the two great rival powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, would attempt to conduct their respective propaganda campaigns of words while seeking to win and hold friends and champions. In Canada, the hot war against Fascist aggression would become a cold war against communist ideology and the erstwhile Russian ally. In this context, Grierson's soft-core internationalism and his support of total mobilization of the country's energies to win the hearts and minds of its citizens to this end, became anomalous.

By 1945, Grierson was preparing to leave Canada and move his crusade on to the international level. Before leaving, he hoped he could marry the Film Board to the Department of External Affairs, not only to ensure its continued survival but also to push the internationalist message in Canada's foreign policy. He hoped that Canada would present an image of its international achievement to a worldwide audience, divided into specialized audiences corresponding with the specialized interests and groupings of the Canadian population. "The real internationalism," he had said, "is in the manias we share with each other."

His choice of successor, 29-year-old James Beveridge, was impolitic and smacked of nepotism; Beveridge was cousin to Norman Robertson, Under Secretary of State for External

Affairs and King's closest foreign affairs adviser. "No one who was realistic would have given a serious thought to the Beveridge succession," said J.W. Pickersgill years later. More significantly, Canada was not prepared to expound Grierson's brand of internationalist foreign policy through the medium of film. Ross McLean became acting Commissioner for 18 months, then permanent Commissioner in 1947 for two more years.

King's aid, Walter Turnbull, who was Grierson's conduit to the Prime Minister, believes that during the war, the people at the top were probably not seeing enough film propaganda to fully appreciate the direction toward which Grierson was steering the country's information policy. He has summarized the picture in 1945 incisively: "Grierson had an over-appreciation of his efforts; his political masters had an under-appreciation which was as far below as was his above. The gap between the two was tremendous."

Thus perished John Grierson's idealistic war for men's minds. He had been fortunate to appear on the scene at an historical moment when world crisis allowed him to develop his unique philosophy of totalitarian propaganda for the good. Victory achieved, liberal democracy sensed that it was better to avoid totalitarianism and say nothing to the millions, than to undo the credo of individualism and laissez faire. And if communication was necessary, the ruling elite would speak to the masses in a one-way process. After rejecting the Grierson conception of propaganda, Canada praised its citizens for having sacrificed enough to make the world safe for the democracy of ruling elites. The ordinary citizen was once again adrift in a sea of alienation, no closer than before to having a significant grasp or input into the destiny of his 'democratic' society. Grierson's unrealized dream of propaganda as education and totalitarianism for the good remained a tantalizing legacy for the progressives of the next generation. □

the grierson files

by Kirwan Cox



Although his style was that of a Scottish clan chieftan, Grierson's ideas were progressive and visionary

Author's Note—Most of the information quoted in this article was taken from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's files on John Grierson extending from 1942 to 1954. These files have become available as a result of the United States' Freedom of Information Act. Most of the documents, however, have been heavily censored by the FBI and some documents are missing. In cases where I have edited a quotation, I use the standard (...) and in cases where the FBI edited the passage quoted, I use the mark (xxx).

In 1945, John Grierson was at the height of his influence and power following his brilliant success organizing one of the world's best wartime propaganda agencies — the National Film Board of Canada. He was actively advising the British, Canadian and American governments on their post-war propaganda needs including the role of mass media in the new United Nations Organization.

Arnold Heeney, Clerk of the Price Council, described the Grierson he knew at this time to an American Embassy official, who recorded Heeney's thoughts:

"Heeney went on to say that Grierson had tuned down many very lucrative offers from Hollywood as he, Grierson, preferred to stay nearer to the political scene. Grierson's interests, he said, were not technical production of films. He was interested in the power of the film in politics, and wanted to stay near the centre of political activity where his knowledge of the use of films would be of most political value. Arnold thought he would like nothing better than a job with the UNO." (U.S. State Department memorandum from Lewis Clarke, April 3, 1946).

From this peak, at a moment when his future never seemed brighter or more secure, Grierson fell abruptly into obscurity. The Gouzenko Case broke, Grierson's name was mentioned in a Russian document, he was kicked out of the United States, and his career never recovered. He became a visionary without a future, living a life increasingly distant from his great triumphs.

The FBI files reveal a campaign of political investigation and harassment which destroyed the post-war career Grierson had planned. Grierson was one of the first victims of the post war Red Scare even before Gouzenko defected. What went wrong? The reason for this campaign stemmed partly from Grierson's personality.

He was a charismatic and arrogant man who aroused passionate responses. His ideas were progressive and visionary, but his style was that of a Calvinist Scottish clan chieftan. He inspired unquestioning loyalty among his friends and bitter enmity among his opponents. A man with Grierson's power and energy was an easy target for envious bureaucrats and others with real or imagined grievances.

During the war, his apparently close relationship with Prime Minister Mackenzie King kept his enemies at bay. Unable to cause this interloper's downfall directly, some were reduced to secret recrimination and rumor-mongering. The FBI was in the business of listening to rumors.

Wartime Rumors

The first of many informants against Grierson contacted the FBI in September 1942, as recorded in an internal memo:

"John Grierson is connected in some manner with the Canadian Government in the handling of motion picture films.

"xxx knows him. xxx and feels that Grierson is a definite communistic sympathizer. He is unable to understand how Grierson has been able to maintain his position with the Canadian Government. About a year ago when Grierson returned from a trip to England, xxx that he did not know how England could be able to hold out and his view was definitely that of an appeasement. (sic)" (1)

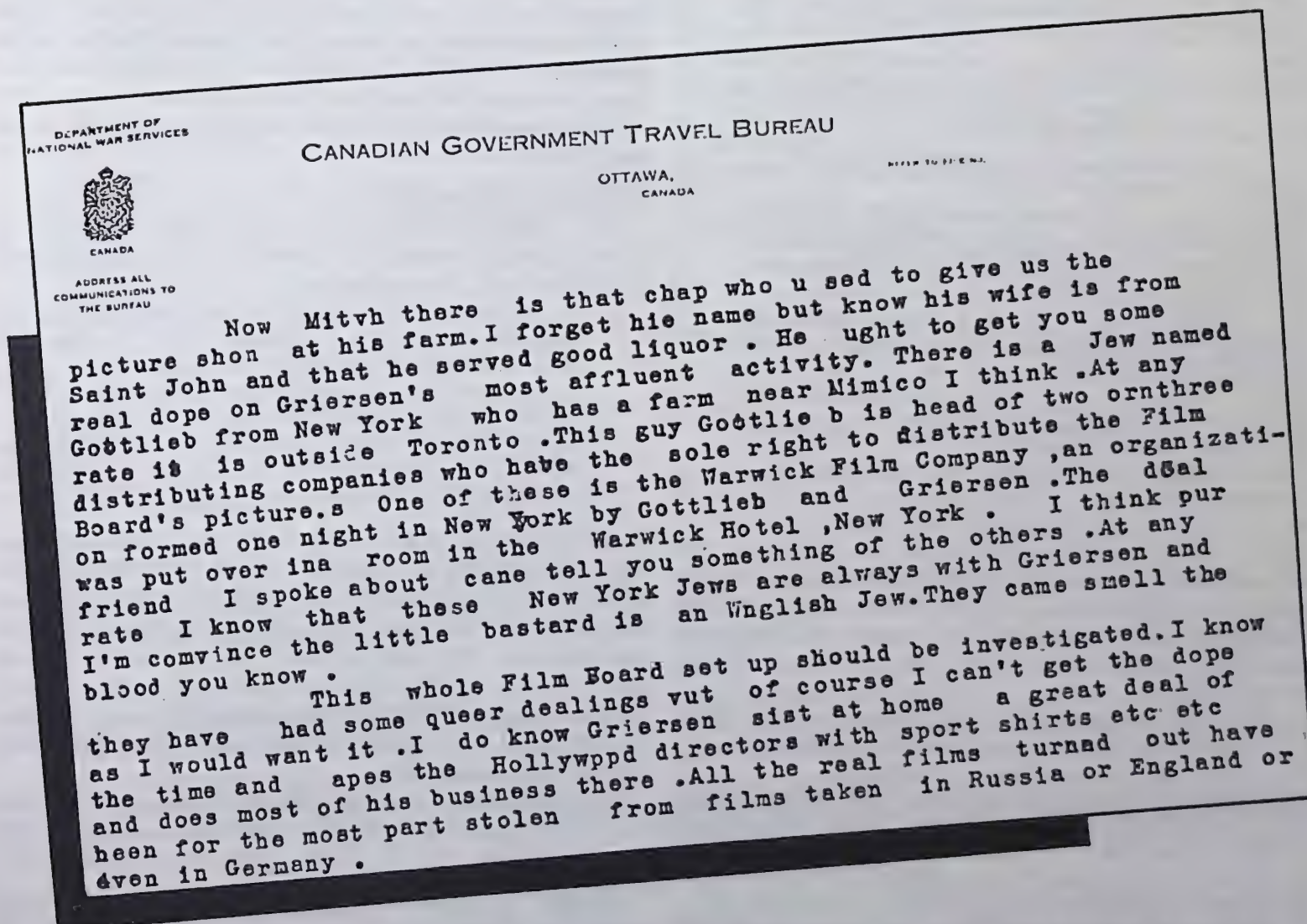
For a year this informant had been counting Grierson's *World in Action* press lineage in *Time* magazine and found he

had been given more space than Time Inc.'s own *March of Time* (a problem publisher Henry Luce shortly corrected). This informant may have been prompted by a movie column John T. McManus wrote in the August 7, 1942, issue of *P.M.* magazine. McManus complained that NFB films showed the Nazis in too strong a light except for one film, *Inside Fighting Russia*, which wasn't being widely distributed because United Artists considered it Communist propaganda.

The informant's report and the McManus article are apparently the only entries in Grierson's FBI file prior to 1945. In Canada, however, attacks on Grierson continued. In December 1942, the head of the Canadian Government Travel Bureau, Leo Dolan, wrote a note to Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn with information on Grierson that might be used to embarrass Hepburn's arch rival, Mackenzie King:

"... Grierson is an out and out C.C.F. follower. He has been cheek by jowl with Coldwell and his group for several years... He has had the inside path with your pal Willie King because away back some years ago Grierson was a product of the Rockefeller Institute in Chicago... So Billy gives John the green light on all things because they were, or are kindred souls and cannot forget the old Alma Mater — the Rockefellers.

... There is a Jew named Gottlieb from New York who has a farm near Mimico I think... This guy Gottlieb is head of two or three distributing companies who have the sole right to distribute the Film Board's pictures. One of these is the Warwick Film Company, an organiza-



Head of the Canadian Government Travel Bureau and one of many informants against Grierson, Leo Dolan, wrote a racist note to Ontario Premier Mitch Hepburn, hoping it might be used to embarrass MacKenzie King. The above is a collage of a few of the central paragraphs and the letterhead on which the note was written

tion formed one night in New York by Gottlieb and Grierson... At any rate I know that these New York Jews are always with Grierson and I'm convinced the little bastard is an English Jew. They can smell the blood you know.

This whole Film Board set-up should be investigated. I know they have had some queer dealings but of course I can't get the dope as I would want it." (2)

Along with Dolan's letter, an unsigned memorandum on the NFB in Hepburn's files added:

"7. It is suggested that the refusal to show the Victory Loan trailer in the Province of Quebec, and *Inside Fighting Russia*,... conclusively proves Grierson's communistic leanings.

8. It is understood that Mrs. John Grierson has contributed communistic articles to American magazines such as the *Nation* and the *New Republic*." (3)

MEMORANDUM RE NATIONAL FILM BOARD

1. It is said that there is sufficient waste and corruption in the Film Board to defeat the King Government.
2. Suggest cable to England to enquire why Grierson was fired by the Film Unit of General Post Office.
3. The Film Board has expanded from a personnel of two or three to two or three hundred, and has increased its expenditures from \$100,000 to \$2,000,000.
4. Suggest Gordon Graydon, M.P. ask Parliament to investigate the National Film Board as it has done with the C. B. C.
5. It is alleged that D.H. Coplan, as Canadian District Manager of United Artists Corporation is using his position as Dollar a year Advisor to the Board to his own advantage and that of United Artists Corporation.
6. It is understood that the true picture of the National Film Board is concealed by Inter-Departmental Appropriations.
7. It is suggested that the refusal to show the Victory Loan trailer in the Province of Quebec, and *INSIDE FIGHTING RUSSIA*, made with Canadian taxpayers' money, and distributed commercially throughout the world, conclusively proves Grierson's communistic leanings.
8. It is understood that Mrs. John Grierson has contributed communistic articles to American magazines such as the *Nation* and the *New Republic*.
9. How many conscientious objectors and draft dodgers are employed by the National Film Board?

Found in Hepburn's files along with Dolan's letter, an unsigned memorandum on the NFB

While most of Grierson's critics accused him of being a communist sympathizer or worse, others accused him of being a crypto-Nazi. On October 16, 1944, former NFB employee Douglas Ross Sinclair wrote to Prime Minister Mackenzie King that the NFB:

"... is an organization as far as I can determine with definite Fascist leanings, an organization giving preference to the type of people whom we call Nazis...

"With John Grierson at the helm of the NFB... (Stuart) Legg has made a series of films in Canada with definite Nazi sympathies...

"Also, why was the World in Action film *Gates of Italy* banned in the USA, if not for it's (sic) fascist content?...

"Why was Mrs. Laura Bolton of the NFB arrested by the American Army Intelligence Officers for illegally photo-

graphing the U.S. Army air bases on Southampton Island when they were under strict military censorship?

"John MacMannus (sic) of New York's *P.M.* sums up the entire situation brilliantly in his article, concerning German propaganda entering the United States from Canada, propoganda (sic) in the form of the NFB of Canada..." (4)

John Grierson responded to these charges in a letter to King's principal secretary dated October 24, 1944:

"Sinclair was a boy on our staff whom we had to get rid of. He was an able young technician but, I am sorry to say, desparately unstable. He is now, I am informed, under psychiatric observation in the Army...

"As regards his comments, they are all somewhat familiar to us now. He has an *idée fixe* regarding myself on which of course I have nothing to say... As regards Mrs. Boulton, there is again no basis in fact... the suggestion of arrest or illegality is absurd. As for McManus of *P.M.* it is worth nothing that his subsequent retraction was as fulsome as his original attack. He is, incidentally, a friend of mine, and the attack was based upon a genuine disagreement with me on the use and effect of captured German material."

Corroborating Grierson's opinion, the NFB received a telegram from the U.S. Signal Corps which "stated that Mr. Sinclair was under average and could not be recommended highly." (6)

The rumors about Grierson were always there under the surface. Grierson was different, an enemy of some sort. The labels changed to suit the prejudice of the speaker — to the 1942 informant he was a communist sympathizer and an appeaser; to Leo Dolan he was a C.C.F.er, an English Jew, and worse, a friend of Willie King's; to Douglas Sinclair he was running an organization with Fascist leanings which gave preference to Nazis.

A Job in Washington?

On April 14, 1945, Al Sherman's Washington column in *Boxoffice* magazine reported "Grierson To Head State Department Film Unit." He said Grierson:

"... is slated to take over active operation of a film unit sponsored by the State Department, with Assistant Secretary Archibald MacLeish actively supervising...

It is believed that if the State Department wins full approval of such a program, (to explain American foreign policy) Grierson will assume active control of all productions. Grierson has been consulted at previous times by the American Government on documentary film production..."

Credibility was added to this rumor because Grierson had been in Washington on leave for a month and had helped the State Department with a film that Secretary of State Stettinius reportedly like very much. He was also a close friend of Archibald MacLeish. On April 20, 1945, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* picked up the *Boxoffice* story with the headline "Report Grierson Taking Film Post at Washington." Grierson returned to Ottawa right away and the Minister responsible for the NFB, J.J. McCann, announced:

"There was no foundation for the earlier report that Mr. Grierson was resigning his government post here to take a position with the United States government on film work."

Despite the official denial, the FBI were very concerned about this rumored job offer. J. Edgar Hoover was already convinced that Grierson was a subversive and whether the job

existed or not, the FBI Director was anxious to block it. On May 24, 1945, Hoover asked the American Embassy in London, England, for background on Grierson, who:

"... will possibly be appointed to a special post in the United States State Department. From information appearing in Bureau files, it is indicated that John Grierson is Communisticly inclined and that several of the films he has produced in Canada appear to be written and directed from a pro-Soviet viewpoint.

... It is rumored that he changed his name at one time, although no positive information is available in this regard." (7)

The World Today Inc.

Grierson resigned from the National Film Board on August 7, 1945, effective three months later. By November 5, 1945, he had organized the non-profit International Film Associates Inc. in Ottawa and Washington with Stuart Legg and Mary Losey Mapes to promote the use of documentary film. Mary, the former wife of film director Joseph Losey, quit her job as an NFB employee in the Canadian Embassy in Washington to work for IFA. (8)

Five months later, on March 20, 1946, Grierson incorporated the World Today Inc. in New York with a paid capitalization of \$63,175. Grierson was President and Chairman of the Board, and owned 51 percent of the stock of this profit-making company. Stuart Legg was Vice-President and Raymond Spottiswoode was Treasurer. (9)

The main asset of the company was a four year contract with United Artists to produce 156 short documentary films, or 39 each year. Two series were called *World Wise* and *One Fact* dealing with world affairs and discoveries in science and nature. Grierson told prospective investors he expected to make \$300,000 to \$400,000 profit on the contract, but World Today never seemed to have enough money. Many NFB hands, beside Spottiswoode and Legg, were working at World Today in New York, including Lou Applebaum, Guy Glover, and Gordon Weisenborn.

At this time, Grierson was living in the United States on a visitor's visa. The American ambassador in Ottawa, Ray Atherton, wrote a top secret letter to the U.S. Secretary of State on March 6, 1946. It said Grierson:

"... may shortly make application for an immigration visa, and to suggest that no visa of any kind should be granted to him until his case has been subjected to searching investigation and clearance with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which, it is understood, is documented in this matter. The Embassy makes this recommendation because it has reason to believe that Mr. Grierson's name has been found in the files of the Soviet agents now being investigated for espionage by the Royal Commission in Canada." (10)

The Gouzenko Case

When Igor Gouzenko defected, files he brought with him proved there was a large Soviet espionage ring operating from the Russian embassy in Ottawa. Unfortunately for Grierson, one of his secretaries at the NFB, Freda Linton, turned out to be a Communist agent — albeit an unsuccessful one. Freda Linton was the only connection Grierson had with the Gouzenko affair, but it was enough to confirm the FBI's strongly held opinion that he was at least a dangerous subversive and probably a foreign agent. According to an NFB memo dated June 28, 1946:

"Freda Linton was interviewed in May, 1944, and was considered a likely candidate for a position in Distribution because of her experience with the International Labour Office. At the time, however, we did not have an opening in Distribution and it was suggested that for a temporary period Miss Linton might work as secretary to Mr. Grierson, in order to free Mr. Moffatt for other duties. As Miss Linton was not as interested in this type of work, it was agreed that she should spend approximately 6 months with Mr. Grierson and, at the end of that time, he would arrange for her to go to Distribution. This arrangement was approved by Mr. Grierson. Miss Linton joined our staff on May 22nd, 1944. She was then transferred to the Distribution Division and given charge of all correspondence with our American offices...

"During the summer of 1945, Mr. Malcolm Ross, then Director of Distribution, suggested the possibility of undertaking new duties in Distribution... Miss Linton did not perform these duties as competently as we had expected and we were considering the possibility of taking her off that work when she herself tendered her resignation. She left the staff September 30, 1945." (11)

When Gouzenko defected he brought, among embassy papers, a note later marked Exhibit 37, which said "Freda to the Professor through Grierson." At the Royal Commission hearing, Gouzenko was asked:

"Q. But was Grierson an agent?

A. Oh no, Grierson is not an agent, but the idea was to get Freda in the position where she could get a more important position in the organization through the influence of Grierson. She was a good friend of Grierson. With a better position she would be able to get more information for Boyer." (12)

Freda Linton had at one time decided to recruit Grierson as a Soviet spy. An FBI memo dated August 16, 1946, says:

"The documents from Zabotin's files and Guzenko's (sic) testimony reflect that at one time "Frieda" submitted to Zabotin a biographical sketch of John Grierson, recommending that he be recruited immediately as an active Soviet agent. The information furnished by "Frieda" was cabled by Zabotin to Red Army Intelligence Headquarters in Moscow, which instructed Zabotin to "stay away from Grierson." These instructions were interpreted by Guzenko and apparently by Zabotin and "Frieda" to clearly indicate that John Grierson was then being "run" as a Soviet agent either by the NKVD in Canada or by some other Soviet espionage network." (13)

The Freda Linton episode was the only "evidence" the FBI ever uncovered that seemed to incriminate Grierson as a Communist or a spy. First, she was his secretary. (However, the NFB's June 28, 1946 memo — which the FBI had — proved she didn't really want to be his secretary.) Second, Exhibit 37 implied that Grierson would help her get another job. That never happened and there was no evidence Grierson ever tried to get her a job outside the NFB. Third, Moscow said "stay away from Grierson." The FBI assumed Moscow's reply meant he already was a spy. Of course, it could also mean he was unrecruitable and Moscow knew that. The fact that Freda wanted to recruit Grierson meant, as far as she was concerned, he wasn't already an agent.

On August 16, 1946, FBI memo claims Gouzenko interpreted the "stay away from Grierson" order to mean Grierson already was a spy. This directly contradicts Gouzenko's actual testimony that "Grierson is not an agent." The FBI, it seemed,

was so intent on establishing Grierson's guilt, they were willing to contradict any evidence supporting Grierson's innocence.

The revelation that Grierson might be connected to the Gouzenko case in some way must have confirmed the worst suspicions of Grierson's enemies. The wartime rumors now made their way to the FBI through the Ottawa Embassy.

The main conduit for rumors from Grierson's detractors in Ottawa was Glenn H. Bethel, the FBI's officer at the American Embassy. He sent his memos, often on FBI letterhead, directly to J. Edgar Hoover. The first was dated April 9, 1946, and pointed out:

"xxx is in possession of considerable information relative to Grierson. xxx is said to be friendly disposed towards Grierson and reportedly has stated that he saw a photograph of Grierson in a Black Shirt Uniform marching with or in Mosley's organization in England."

"Canadian authorities" actively encouraged the American investigation of Grierson and suggested Legg should be included. Ambassador Atherton wrote to Washington:

"Mr. Legge (sic) may or may not have been connected with Grierson in this particular matter (Gouzenko), but it has been confidentially stated by Canadian authorities his activities warrant investigation." (14)

Evidence Against Grierson

Aside from Freda Linton, what did the FBI have on Grierson? Nothing, except that they didn't like Grierson's attitudes or his friends. The FBI files point out that "public statements made by Grierson have reportedly been consonant with the approach of the Canadian Communist Party"; that in January, 1945, Grierson had given a speech to the United Automobile Workers in Milwaukee; that the *Daily Worker* had commented favourably on an NFB film about the United Nations; that the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, which was "subject to strong Communist influence," planned to meet Grierson in December, 1944; that Grierson contributed an article to *The Hollywood Quarterly* which was published by a group "subject to strong Communist domination"; and that Grierson was in contact with such "subversives" as Joris Ivens or Ivor Montagu.

Another questionable contact was Dr. Malcolm Ross. Ross, in addition to running the NFB's distribution operation at the end of the war, was acting Director of the National Council of Canadian-Soviet Friendship. On April 1, 1947, the FBI man in Ottawa, Glenn Bethel, reminded Hoover of Ross' background and the fact that the FBI had a:

"... manuscript prepared by Grierson outlining the needs of the Canadian National Film Board and offering the names of Ross McLean, Malcolm Ross, and James Beveridge as his possible successor."

Hoover Intensifies The Investigation

On September 12, 1946, Hoover ordered the New York field office to begin a "full investigation" of Grierson. This meant the FBI would actively solicit informants, monitor his travel, check all of his personal and telephone contacts, and search his effects. Hotel staff were interviewed:

"Pursuant to Bureau request a search was made at the xxx for subject, Grierson's (sic), xxx with negative results.

At the Warwick Hotel xxx advised that Grierson was one of their most frequent visitors and first stopped at the Warwick in 1939 and since then has been coming down at least once every two weeks...He said Grierson used the hotel as a combination office and home while in New



Arthur "Killer" Gottlieb (right) with two of the Allen family at Sloppy Joe's Bar in Havana, Cuba in the early '30's

York City. Among the best contacts Grierson made in New York is Arthur Gottlieb of the Du-Art Film Labs, Inc.... Gottlieb has been seen by xxx in Grierson's presence practically every trip Grierson made to this country while stopping in New York." (15)

In some cases the investigation turned up information that contradicted the FBI's assumption of Grierson's guilt. One interviewee:

"xxx volunteered that Grierson refused to have Communists on his staff at any time and that he could never have anything to do with them." (16)

In November, the FBI searched the Liberty Warehouse where Grierson's effects were stored. Nothing was found. Hoover wasn't satisfied. He wanted the material in the warehouse searched again in greater detail.

At this time, the FBI found their best source of information on Grierson. This was "Confidential Informant T-1" who obviously knew Grierson very well and probably worked in The World Today offices. He was described in a December 9, 1946, memo as:

"a highly confidential source with access to the records of John Grierson which was effected through xxx Special Agents, and xxx photographer."

With the recruitment of "T-1", the quantity and quality of information on Grierson improved noticeably because the FBI seemed to have complete access to Grierson's files and correspondence. This material was laboriously re-typed in most cases. (Obviously the Xerox machine has been a god-send to the spy business.)

As the investigation of Grierson intensified, it also widened to include his closest contacts. Everyone whom Grierson reached on the phone was checked by the New York office against their "index" of names to see if Grierson was in touch with others subversives or known agents. There is no evidence from the files available that his phone was being tapped and conversations recorded.

However, during this time, many NFB people thought their phones were tapped. NFB personnel chief Beth Bertram sent Grierson Freda's employment record which ended up in the FBI's hands care of "T-1". An accompanying note said in part:

"... By the way, I shouldn't be surprised if my telephone at home is tapped. It seems to be quite usual these days..." (17)

Friendship with Grierson was sufficient reason for the FBI to begin an investigation. One memo mentioned in passing:

"Mary Losey Mapes has been the subject of considerable investigation because of her close association with John Grierson..." (18)

The FBI would even undertake a full investigation of someone whose name sounded like Grierson even if there was no other connection. One such innocent bystander was Bertram M. Gerson who lived in Miami Beach. On February 17, 1947, the New York office told the Miami office that Grierson held P.O. Box 4375 in Miami Beach. Even though it was quickly discovered Grierson did not hold this box, the investigation of Gerson, who did not hold it, began.

Gerson's background was checked, his neighbours and associates were interviewed and shown photos of Grierson and Linton. Eventually, the Miami office proved Gerson and Grierson were not the *same person*. The whole episode was a mistake which would never have been explained to Gerson or his neighbours who probably regarded him with suspicion from that point forward.

The Immigration Visa Is Denied

Meanwhile, Grierson was still trying to get a permanent visa. On January 30, 1947, Ottawa FBI agent Glenn Bethel wrote to Hoover from Ottawa that Grierson had:

"... called at the American Embassy at Ottawa in order to renew his request for a U.S. visa... and he will meet with little success in his efforts in this regard..."

The FBI made sure the State Department rejected the request. The reason for the visa denial was explained in a previous internal FBI memo somewhat melodramatically. It said Grierson:

"... was suspected of being a Soviet espionage agent. Recently the State Department denied his application for a visa on the grounds that he was an agent of a foreign power." (19)

A subsequent FBI memo stated more accurately that the visa:

"... has been refused consistently by the State Department because of the information available concerning Grierson's past activities and contacts." (20)

Just to be certain there was no mistake, Hoover wrote to the U.S. State Department that:

"... You will recall that a summary of the available information concerning Grierson was made available to you sometime ago. In view of the character of this information I desire to point out that I feel it is undesirable to permit Grierson to enter the United States on an immigration visa at this time." (21)

On February 15, 1947, Grierson's visa problems appeared

in the Ottawa press and four days later Tory MP Donald Fleming (Eglinton-Toronto) asked the Government whether it had:

"... any information concerning the refusal of the United States authorities to grant him a quota visa for residence in the U.S., and any information concerning the reasons for such a refusal... Is he entitled to enter or reside in Canada?" (22)

On February 22, 1947, the *New York Herald-Tribune* reported Grierson:

"... said today that the State Department had refused his request for a residential visa eighteen months ago without giving a reason..."

"I am not a Communist and any inference of this kind is ridiculous," he said. "The whole thing is silly, since I have been a British public servant for years."

While there were never any specific public charges laid against him, Grierson assumed that the Freda Linton connection was the major reason for the visa denial. Yet, instead of using the Gouzenko testimony that he was not an agent to publicly defend himself, Grierson said the whole thing was silly because he "had been a British public servant for years." In the days of the Cold War, this was not a very convincing rebuttal to the charge that one might be a Soviet spy.

The master of propaganda failed in his own defence. He was either too proud to stoop to a defence of his character, or he thought a loud public defence might do him more harm by reinforcing the nameless "accusations."

The press publicity did make it increasingly difficult for Grierson to carry on his business and easier for the FBI to recruit patriotic informants as this undated memo shows:

"... further advised that he had learned from the papers about Grierson's apparent connection with the Canadian Espionage Case... He further advised that he would be willing to cooperate in any way whatsoever with the Bureau insofar as ascertaining Grierson's connections and contacts which are made through The World Today offices." (23)

Grierson had become a serious liability to The World Today Inc. and couldn't stay in New York to run it without a visa. On April 16, 1947, Stuart Legg took over as President although Grierson remained Chairman of the Board. Raymond Spottiswoode was replaced by Maynard Gertler as Treasurer and Eleanor Aaron remained Secretary of the corporation.

International Film Associates had already been winding down. At a meeting on August 28, 1946, at which Jean Benoit Levy resigned because of his job at the United Nations as Director of Films and Visual Information:

"... it was decided that the International Film Associates should be continued principally as a basis for the exchange of information on the development of documentary films in the international field inasmuch as most of the members of the International Film Associates were tied up either in "The World Today, Incorporated" or in other undertakings." (24)

Grierson's Career At The United Nations

As Canadian mandarin Arnold Heeney had pointed out in a conversation in Ottawa which ended up in the U.S. State Department files, Grierson "would like nothing better than a job at the UNO." (25) In the spring of 1946, Grierson was being considered for a job at the United Nations. The FBI found out, and just as Hoover had blocked Grierson's rumoured job at the State Department a year earlier, he now set out to block this job.

Hoover sent out Grierson's dossier to various senior bureaucrats in Washington. He was so concerned that he wrote to President Truman on April 16, 1946, through the President's military aide, Gen. Harry Vaughan:

"As of possible interest to the President and you, there is attached a strictly confidential memorandum concerning John Grierson who it is understood is presently being considered for appointment to the position of Assistant to the Secretary General of the United Nations in Charge of Press Relations."

The United Nations didn't hire Grierson. A year later, after Grierson's visa problems and his resignation from The World Today, a State Department official telephoned the FBI for more information on Grierson because "Grierson was seeking a connection with UNESCO." (26)

This time Grierson was successful because he was:

"... appointed by the British Government as adviser on Mass Media and Public Information to the Director General of the UNESCO." (27)

The Director General of the UNESCO was Englishman Julian Huxley and it appears the Americans, that is the FBI, couldn't veto his appointment. Hoover believed Grierson had friends at the U.S. State Department. At the bottom of a memo dated May 14, 1946, he wrote:

"I think we should make objection to Grierson's entry to U.S. and do so at once. It may smoke out his backer. H."

A press report in the *Washington Times-Herald* was headlined "Spy Suspect Gets U.N. Job":

"John Grierson, former Canadian government official questioned in the Russian Spy Case, has been appointed director of propaganda in thirty-one countries, including

the U.S., for (UNESCO), it was disclosed here today.

"The new UNESCO propaganda chief is unable to enter the U.S. legally. He was refused a visa last February. It was reported unofficially that the State Department turned down Grierson's application at the request of the FBI..." (28)

Unable to block Grierson's job, Hoover asked the State Department:

"... Whether or not Grierson actually has or will be granted any form of diplomatic immunity by virtue of his position as a representative of UNESCO." (29)

The FBI Director wanted Grierson's bags searched on his return to the U.S. The State Department had no objections to such a search if it was carried out by Customs officials. But, they pointed out Grierson was travelling under a United States 3(7) visa as a UN representative which entitled him to diplomatic immunity. Hoover explained all of this to his New York office and gave them instructions in a classic example of "if you're caught, I didn't tell you to do it" bureaucratese:

"The above information is being furnished you for your guidance in connection with the further investigation of this case and, of course, no baggage search should be made of Grierson's effects if it appears that it is likely to cause a public incident identifying the Bureau as having demanded the search of the baggage of a United Nations representative." (30)

Whether or not Grierson's bags were searched every time he entered the United States, the FBI found nothing and Hoover turned his attention to the fact that Grierson was able to enter at all.

The FBI Director wrote to the U.S. Attorney General on February 28, 1948:

"In spite of the efforts of this Bureau and the cooperative attitude displayed by officials of the State Department, Grierson was permitted entry into this country in March, October, and November of 1947. On each of these occasions he was granted a United States 3(7) visa entitling him to diplomatic immunity... Under such circumstances, complete protection of the security of the United States from the threat imposed by his presence in this country is impracticable."

Grierson's tenure at the U.N. was cut short. In an article datelined Washington, the *New York World-Telegram* on February 1, 1948 that "U.N. Fires Canadian Atom Spy Case Figure":

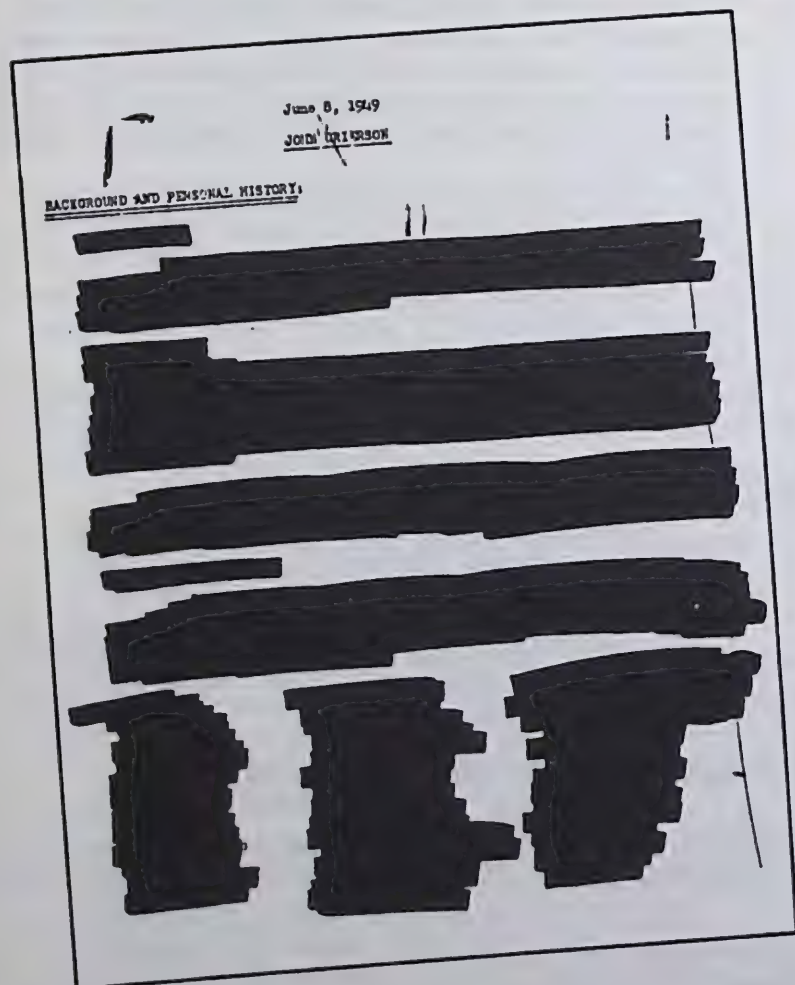
"A Canadian whose name figured prominently in the American phases of the Canadian spy case has been dismissed as an employee of the (UNESCO), informed sources disclosed today.

"He is John Grierson, former chairman of the National Film Board of Canada who was granted a visa to enter the United States as a U.N. employee over the objections of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

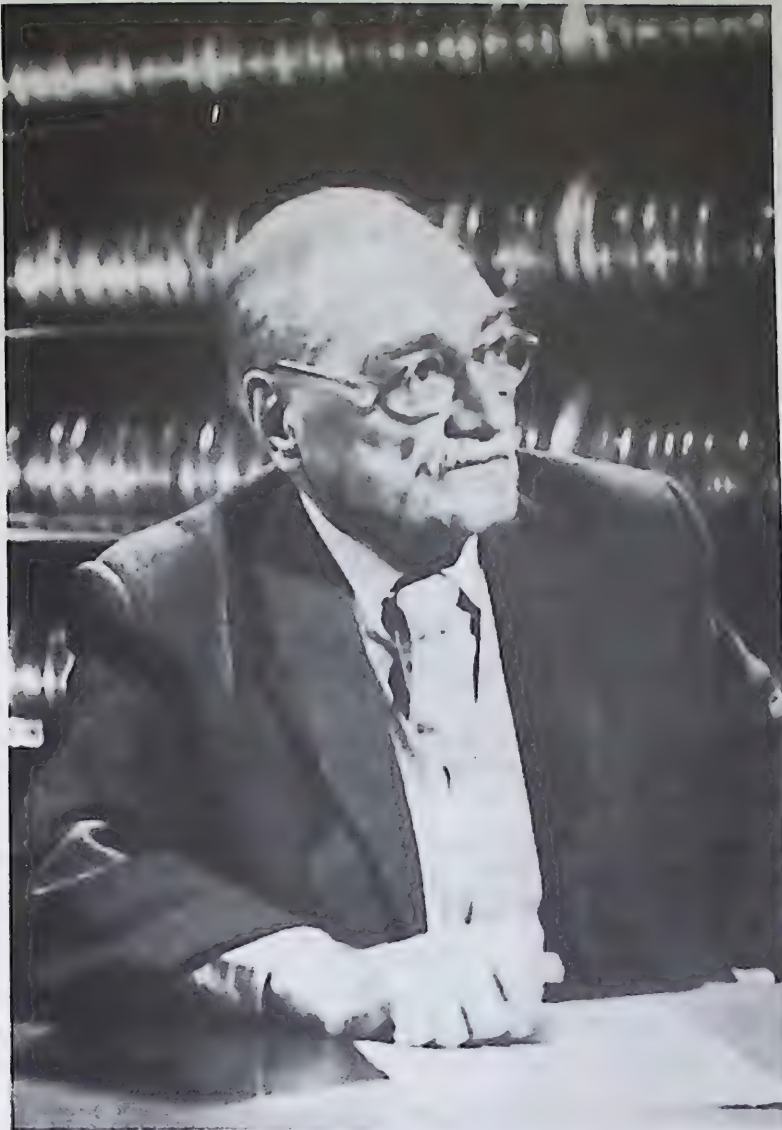
"He was one of 328 persons classified as "possible subversives" who entered the U.S. on U.N. credentials. A visa section employee drew an official reprimand for telling a Congressional committee about it..."

Other FBI memos later mark Grierson's "resignation" from UNESCO as March 30, 1948, The FBI and many other people would have looked at Grierson's firing in terms of 1 down and 327 possible subversives to go.

It is interesting to note that Grierson's close friend and "backer" at the State Department, Archibald MacLeish, was elected to a three year term on the Executive Board of UNESCO in 1947. He resigned the same year. It would seem



An example of the type of information on Grierson that is available from the FBI as a result of the Freedom of Information Act



Grierson back home on the set of *This Wonderful World* (Scottish Television)

that the cold war casualties at the United Nations included high ranking Americans as well as foreigners like Grierson.

Grierson Remembers UNESCO

Many years later, Grierson recalled his experience at UNESCO in biblical terms:

"I had a very particular responsibility at UNESCO at the time. I was in Mass Communications. I was only there for one purpose and one purpose only; to watch this situation of the 'free flow of information' in relation to UNESCO.

"The Americans thought of taking over, of financing, UNESCO and taking over all the radio stations, which had been set up by the great warring nations, and putting a radio network around the world.

"Now we get to Archie MacLeish's great dream. You know: 'It is in the minds of men that war, the spirit of war, is engendered and that war is created. In the minds of men, peace must be found, etc, etc,' The World Radio Network was going to do this and we were to declare... that the free flow of information was to be an absolute in our thought between nations.

"I was approached as the guy who was going to be the key in this great World Radio Network, and in the preaching of peace throughout the world. The money, of course, was so vast that the budget of Mass Communications of UNESCO would have been eight times the size of the whole of the rest of UNESCO.

"So, this totally excellent scheme was offered to me. You talk about somebody being taken up to the heights and tested there. The character was taken up — that was me. All these domains should be mine. Well, I've been there and this is against my principles in some fundamental way. It sounded so beautiful and I love Archie MacLeish — an awful good nice man — but this is against my principles... We were handing over this vast machine to American know-how, to American technicians, to an inevitable American stranglehold on information." (31)

The Last Informant

Once Grierson is out of the United Nations and unable to return to the U.S., the FBI loses interest in his case. A March 30, 1949, memo says:

"John Grierson reported discharged as employee of UN Economic Social and Cultural Organization. No further investigation outstanding."

The American Embassy in South Africa reports on October 20, 1949, that Grierson would be in Pretoria for seven weeks to advise that government on its film needs. The FBI file seems to end with this information.

After a five year hiatus, Grierson's file was reopened in 1954 when an informant called the FBI office in Newark, New Jersey, and belatedly pointed out that the National Film Board was a nest of Communists. This informant was Douglas Sinclair, the same Douglas Sinclair who wrote to the Prime Minister in 1944 that the Board was a nest of Nazis. Sinclair's interview with the Newark FBI was passed on to Hoover in a memo dated November 5, 1954. It said:

"... During the war the Canadian Government expelled Grierson for Communist activities..."

"All of the individuals mentioned by Sinclair in the course of interview were at one time closely associated with Grierson in the National Film Board... basis for characterizing those individuals as subversive and as still engaged in the production of films connected with subversive propaganda is based on their association with Grierson..."

Sinclair went through a list of people including Ross McLean, Grant McLean, Sydney Newman, Ralph Foster, Robert Anderson, Ernst Borneman, Boris Kauffman, Gordon Weisenborn, Stuart Legg, Lawrence and Evelyn Cherry, and others, claiming all were subversives. He claims erroneously that many, including Grierson, were expelled from either Canada or the Board as a result. In nearly every case, Sinclair's version had obvious factual errors. Sinclair said that Laura Bolton:

"... was arrested during the war for photographing the U.S. Air base on South Hampton Island, Hudson Bay, but believes little was made of this episode through the efforts of the National Film Board and Canadian Government."

Despite the voluminous FBI files on Grierson which made it obvious Sinclair was fabricating information, J. Edgar Hoover repeated Sinclair's allegations and misinformation verbatim in a memo dated November 19, 1954, to the CIA and State Department. Hoover said:

"According to the informant John Grierson was the Director of the National Film Board of Canada from 1938 until sometime during World War II. During the war the Canadian Government expelled Grierson for Communist activities and he proceeded to New York City where he organized a film production company named, World-To-day Film Company (the informant is not sure if this is the correct name of the company)..."

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Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V8
613/237-3400

Obviously, Hoover checked his own files before spreading Sinclair's allegations. At the very least, this is an example of incredible incompetence for a counter espionage agency of the FBI's reputation. People whom Sinclair had called Nazis in 1943-44 were now called Communists in 1954. The names were the same (like Bolton's alleged photography of a U.S. Base), only the political label had been changed to fit the prevailing "enemy."

Sinclair himself is an example of the type of informant the FBI's practices encouraged. His misinformation was accepted by the FBI without verification. Such practices, especially during periods of hysteria like the cold war, destroyed careers without the victim ever being able to answer the accusations, or face his accuser.

Victims of political investigations, such as Grierson, did not have the same rights as a criminal in a courtroom. They were presumed guilty unless proven innocent and innocence was often impossible to prove. A brilliant man's career was prematurely finished.

1. FBI, Sept. 9, 1942
2. Ontario Archives
3. Ibid.
4. Public Archives Canada
5. Ibid. Grierson to W. J. Turnbull
6. NFB, Board of Governor's Minutes, Dec. 14, 1943
7. FBI, Press summary no. 66866
8. At this time, IFA identified the associates as: M.A. Adamson (Canada), Jean-Benoit Levy (France), Robert Flaherty (U.S.A.), John Grierson (Canada), Stuart Legg (Great Britain), Mary Losey (U.S.A.), Edward B. Marks (U.S.A.), Walter A. Rudlan (U.S.A.), R.J. Spottiswoode (Great Britain) and Basil Wright (Great Britain).
9. Eleanor Aaron, former publicity head for "March of Time," was secretary. The company's backers included Walter Wanger, Alfred Stern, Arthur Mayer, Maynard Gertler, Eliot Pratt and Richardson Wood.
10. U.S. Dept. of State
11. NFB, Beth Bertram to Ross McLean, June 28, 1946
12. FBI, transcript copied from Grierson's files in New York
13. On March 18, 1947, Ambassador Atherton reported that J.A. "Pet" Sullivan had defected from the Canadian Communist Party and resigned as president of the Canadian Seaman's Union. Sullivan said:
"In 1939 the Communist Party placed a Miss Frieda (sic) Lenden, alias Linton, in our office as secretary. However, in the spring of 1940 I refused to take political direction from her. She later became private secretary to the head of the Film Board. She was one of those charged under the Royal Commission, but, however, left the country and was never brought to trial."
14. Atherton to U.S. Secretary of State, March 6, 1946
15. FBI, New York office to Hoover, Sept. 18, 1946
16. Ibid.
17. Beth Bertram to Grierson, July 26, 1946
18. FBI, June 9, 1949
19. FBI, Dec. 9, 1946
20. FBI, March 12, 1947
21. FBI, March 15, 1947
22. Ottawa Journal, Feb. 19, 1947
23. FBI, undated memo No 66910
24. FBI memo, Dec. 9, 1946, copy of IFA minutes
25. U.S. State Dept. memo, April 3, 1946, from Lewis Clark
26. FBI, April 22, 1947
27. FBI, June 8, 1949
28. Grierson's actual title was "Director of Mass Communications for UNESCO," Times-Herald, Sept. 24, 1947
29. FBI, June 9, 1947
30. FBI, June 30, 1947
31. CRTC, transcript of interviews recorded with John Grierson, 1969-71, pp 75-76

National Film Board of Canada:

1940-52

censorship and scares

by piers handling

Re the National Film Board's classic of inept, inaccurate and outrageously expensive filmmaking, No Act of God (NFB Rejects Pressure to Ban Anti-Atomic Film – Nov. 23)

My "demand" that it be withdrawn was not made on the grounds that it was biased and incorrect. The NFB has already acknowledged the first charge and can hardly deny the second in view of the evidence provided it. . .

The grounds for my complaint were that as the custodian of film footage for Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd., the NFB had taken footage and maliciously misused it. . .

A.R. Burge
Director, Public Affairs
Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.
Ottawa

N.M. Ediger (letter, Nov. 29) accuses the National Film Board of bias in producing and distributing *No Act of God*, and implies that tax money is going to present problems of nuclear power while none is going to present advantages. This is not so. The NFB distributes at least six films commissioned by Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (i.e., produced with taxpayer money) presenting nuclear power in a very favourable light. If Mr. Ediger is really concerned about equal representation on both sides of the nuclear question, he should be calling for more films on the problems of nuclear power. . .

With this in mind, it is difficult to take Mr. Ediger's complaint about one-sided information seriously.

Jan Marmorek
Energy Probe
Toronto

The uproar over *No Act of God* is the most recent in a line of political controversies in which the Film Board has been submerged throughout its history. There are perhaps more illustrious predecessors which caused far more furore in their day. Denys Arcand's documentary on the textile industry in Quebec, *On est au coton*, was banned in 1971 ostensibly over its factual inaccuracies. But more to the point its position had shocked the textiles lobby into insisting on its withdrawal. The ensuring publicity, apart from establishing Arcand's reputation, ended in the banning of the film. But numerous video "boot-leg" copies were circulated throughout Quebec, and in fact, although under censure, it became one of the most widely seen Film Board films in the province. A year later Gilles Groulx's *24 heures ou plus* was similarly banned, although this time the Board's management had learned its lesson – it never allowed a composite print to be made, and stored the elements in different warehouses. This film called for the overthrow of the present government, a position that the film commissioner of the day, Sydney Newman, found indefensible, coming as it did from a government agency. There are other interesting episodes, one example being Mick Scott's *The Winner* (also known as *Albert, la grenouille*), made as part of a language training series which gleefully satirized the whole concept of bilingualism. Newman was enraged by it, and Scott describes it as a film "totally in bad taste and meant to be." It has never been seen outside the Film Board. Another example is Jacques Leduc's black and pessimistic *Cap d'espoir*, withheld by film commissioner Hugo McPherson in 1969 described by Leduc as "a film about the despair which floated in the air in Quebec a year before the October crisis. It was about the muted violence that existed and about the monopoly over news held by Power Corp." ¹ Arcand succinctly summarized his and Leduc's position: "The Film Board makes thousands of films to say that all goes well in Canada, that the western wheat fields are very beautiful, that Glenn Gould plays the piano well and that Paul Anka is an extraordinary star. So I think it is just normal that there should now and then be a

Both letters appeared in *The Globe and Mail* 2 December 1978

film which says that everything is rotten and that we live in a country that is corrupt from top to bottom." 2

There are other more insidious, less transparent cases. Don Brittain and John Kemeny's *Bethune* was a courageous film, dealing with the famed surgeon, made in 1963-64. The Department of External Affairs was cool to the idea, perhaps afraid of offending the Americans. The Board did not give the film its official sanction. External Affairs refused to carry prints in its embassies. In the mid-sixties, post-Cuba era, it was risqué to admit that there had been a Canadian communist. Robin Spry's *Action: The October Crisis of 1970* had its share of problems. The Board of Governors, amidst other objections, insisted that the final line of narration be dropped. Originally Spry's script read to the effect: the 1970 crisis involved a painful loss of innocence for Canada; however the question still remains — will Quebec sepearte? The second half of this statement was taken out, placing the final emphasis on Canada, not Quebec.

In the late fifties, Groulx had made a film on a mining town which was overtly critical of the economic and social realities that dominated this particular community. The people in Normétal were shown to be slaves of the mine, dominated by an economic enterprise which did not essentially serve their best interests. Groulx's original cut of the film ran to forty minutes. But it encountered difficulties, running as it did, counter to the prevailing economic philosophy of the day. Groulx cut the film to 30 minutes but this was still not satisfactory. The

board cut it to its present length of 17 minutes, to which Groulx refused to attach his name.

Ten years later Pierre Perrault presented the Board with *Un pays sans bons sens! ou Wake Up, Mes bons amis!!!* The message was simple: the people of Quebec will be spiritually lost if they do not find a country of their own. Sydney Newman originally allowed the film to be released with a restriction: it could only be shown to audiences that specifically requested it, but not on television or in commercial theatres. This decision was eventually altered by Newman.

Perhaps half a dozen films are not enough to get upset over, but more examples exist. Although the films discussed were made, others were not, and others moreover, were toned down by the filmmakers. Self-censorship is an indefinable process: cumulative experience teaches you where your borders are and how far you can go. To grapple with political censorship at the Film Board necessitates a look at its early history and the lessons it learned.

More than anyone else, John Grierson was responsible for the National Film Board — its structure, its purpose, its function. He wanted it to operate close to the politicians, to be, in effect, the voice of parliament. He saw a great role for film, as a tool for social change, as an educational instrument, as a weapon to spread the democratic word. Yet the financial where-withall provided the key, since film was an extremely expensive medium. He had two choices: to look to the public or to the private sector for sponsorship. He chose the former, decid-



It was "a ramshackle old mill . . . a terrible fire trap," said Arthur Irwin of the original NFB headquarters on John Street on the Ottawa

ing that it would give him more freedom. But as someone spending the public's money, he was keenly sensitive to the responsibility inherent in that arrangement. When the National Film Board was created in 1939 (as a supervisory board, not a production agency as we now know it) it was to be comprised of a chairman, who was to be the Minister of Trade and Commerce, another member of the King's Privy Council for Canada, and six other members: three civil servants, and three others from outside the civil service. The potential for political interference was obvious and through the years would become more complicated, particularly when Cabinet policy clashed with decisions of the Board. The chairman, and one other, were both Cabinet ministers, yet they could be outvoted by the Board on matters that contradicted government policy.

But Grierson considered it essential to operate a mere step away from the political forum. Only in this way could the Film Board represent the desire and dictums of *parliament*, which to him distilled the wishes of the country. The war simplified this relationship to a certain extent, because the will of the people was relatively clear and united as one force — to win the war. However there were problems and they were uniformly of a political nature.

After accepting the job of film commissioner in October 1939, Grierson was faced with an unenviable task. He had to provide films for a country that lacked any real production industry. It's true that the already existing Government Motion Picture Bureau had a trained staff and equipment, but the Bureau was by this time a tired workhorse, and it lacked both inspiration and drive. Associated Screen News was a steady producer in Montreal, and Audio Pictures was operating out of Toronto. Leon Shelley had formed the Vancouver Motion Picture Company on the west coast, but all of these companies produced little more than a steady diet of newsreels and industrial films. Looking around, Grierson got in touch with Louis de B. Rochemont in an attempt to persuade his prestigious American *March of Time* unit to feature Canada in one of its monthly releases. Rochemont agreed and a crew was sent to shoot scenes of Canada mobilizing for war. Grierson himself was due to leave for Australia in late January 1940, to complete a project that the outbreak of war had interrupted. A week before his departure, the premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, launched a bitter attack on Mackenzie King, and denounced the federal government for its failure to conduct Canada's war duties in the vigorous manner required. Parliament had been summoned for January 25, and on that day King asked for an immediate dissolution and an election on this issue. Grierson had left for warmer climes, leaving his assistant (and future film commissioner) Ross McLean to supervise the *March of Time* film entitled *Canada at War*. He had also suggested that the notorious Colonel Cooper, head of the powerful Canadian Motion Picture Distributor's Association, be appointed acting commissioner in his absence. Grierson obviously hoped to cement further relations with the dominant exhibition/distribution arm of the private sector through this move.

McLean, a staunch Liberal who had edited the publications of the National Liberal Federation in the 1935 election, helped steer the film to depict King in a favourable light. King had nervously appeared before the cameras to give a good account of himself, and recognized that the film's release at an opportune time would do him no harm. The film was due to appear on March 1, 1940, but J.J. Fitzgibbons, President of Famous

Players, who controlled numerous Canadian theatres, warned Hepburn about the film's possible contents in a letter:

I suggest that you see the *March of Time* issue to be released March 1st, entitled "Canada at War." While not planned, the subject matter will prove great political propaganda for the Federal Party.³

When Ross McLean went to an Ottawa theatre on the first, after escorting prints of the film from New York, he found to his horror and amazement that the film was not being shown. Colonel Cooper was contacted and he "seemed most anxious to shift the blame around and scouted any idea of politics entering into it, although jokingly saying that as a Tory he would be happier if the film held off for a month. . ."⁴

Meanwhile the film was playing in the other provinces and was overtly used as a political propaganda. King was furious with Hepburn and felt that his election chances were being severely damaged in Ontario. King's administrative secretaries parried back and forth with Cooper and Hepburn, while de Rochemont was outraged that a *March of Time* film was used as a political football. But King was returned with a massive majority and the storm was over.

The inference that the Film Board was just a mouthpiece for the political party in power was to dog it for years. Two and a half years later Hepburn banned another NFB film. *Inside Fighting Canada*, part of the *Canada Carries On* series, was a brief survey of Canada's contribution to the Allied war effort. Hepburn, although no longer premier of Ontario, was Provincial Treasurer, and the Ontario Censor Board was still within his jurisdiction. On Christmas Eve 1942, Grierson discovered that Hepburn had delayed release of the film. This time Hepburn found inaccuracies in the commentary. There was a reference mentioning that the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan had graduated "hundreds of thousands of flyers." This was a gross inaccuracy. But the greatest exception was taken to a stirring passage near the film's finale:

Behind the spires of parliament and the leadership of William Lyon Mackenzie King stands a people disciplined for war. Behind the new national management of price and wage controls, behind the efficiency of Government measures, stand the Canadian people themselves. A people who make a national policy of voluntary service."

As with *Canada at War*, the film had been released at a sensitive time. There had been labour strikes and threats of strikes, demands for the resignation of federal cabinet ministers, and a great deal of open criticism of the wartime administration. Under these pressures the King government found it necessary to submit the question at issue to the Supreme Court of Canada by way of what is known as a stated case. Members of the Ontario Censor Board, who classified and censored all new releases, felt that:

". . . the National Film Board acted in decidedly bad taste, at least, when it presented the film for censorship at the present time. . . It is impossible to suggest that the views of the government, as expressed by its spokesman for 'Inside Fighting Canada' could influence members of the Supreme Court of Canada, but the Board must observe that unless the Court sees fit to unanimously and sweepingly support the Federal Government with its

stated case, the opinion of the commentator becomes inaccurate beyond question.”⁵

The Film Board seemed to be playing partisan politics again. Grierson's rationale for the inclusion of the King reference was succinct: “It would be strange to Canadians if in a survey of Britain's war effort special care were taken to omit the name of Mr. Churchill.”⁶ Under pressure, Hepburn and the censor board were forced to back away, and by New Year's Eve the film was surprisingly passed without cuts.

Meanwhile Grierson and Stuart Legg, who provided the creative thrust for many of the Board's films, were directing their attentions to the *World in Action* series which had immense foreign distribution. The two of them were firmly committed to an internationally-oriented postwar world, and, from the inception of this series, its films examined the social economic and political life of other countries. The philosophy was progressive and novel, largely directed toward potential problems of the postwar world, rather than toward the more immediate war aims of the Allies.

At first there seemed to be little danger in the NFB making films of this type, but criticism began in mid-1943 over *The Gates of Italy*. The film was attacked for being ‘soft’ on fascism; one journalist headlined his article: “Will Someone Please Tell the NFB About Fascism.”⁷ Early in 1944, *Our Northern Neighbour* was held up by the Quebec Censor Board, because it was strongly pro-communist in its interpretation of Russian history. Questions were asked in the Commons:

There has been a growing suspicion that the film board has become a propagandist for a type of socialist and foreign philosophy; heretofore it was merely an instrument of propaganda for the government . . . My objection is that we have a national instrument of government that is obviously putting out soviet propaganda. I feel strongly that it is not the duty of any vehicle of government to put out propaganda concerning any foreign country. The film board should be a Canadian film board and it should put out Canadian propaganda.⁸

However, Grierson and Legg were not to be halted in their vision of informing people about the future structure of the postwar world. The crisis came in January 1945. It involved another *World in Action* film, *Balkan Powder Keg*, and it was again the work of Legg. Historically the territory called the Balkans was political dynamite, Russian long regarding it as an important sphere of influence, and England was most sensitive to any Mediterranean threat. The film was critical of British policies, while concurrently Churchill and King were arguing over the possible use of Canadian troops in this area. To avoid further deterioration in relations between Britain and Canada, King asked that the film be withdrawn. It was pulled during its initial playdates. Grierson was upset by the censure, feeling that a matter of principle was involved. He told his board that the NFB should not become simply a spokesman for the official point of view. His maverick attitude had ironically seen him range across the entire spectrum while in Canada, being accused alternately as an apologist for King, and as a producer of left-wing propaganda.

Grierson was soon off to New York at war's end, but Canada and the spectre of communism were to follow him and seriously affect his career. Igor Gouzenko's defection in Ottawa

would usher in the cold war period, implicate Grierson, and by association, the Film Board. Grierson appeared before the Royal Commission investigating Gouzenko's allegations twice, because a former secretary of his had ostensibly been part of the spy ring, and his name had been mentioned in notebooks uncovered by the RCMP. The entire affair was not kind to Grierson, and the “communist” tag was attached more frequently to the NFB as a result.

The Gouzenko affair damaged the Board's reputation seriously, and no doubt left an indelible mark on the place, affecting decisions as to which films it felt it could, or could not, make. Certainly the scope of NFB films in the immediate postwar period reflects the first shifts. Legg and *World in Action* had looked at international problems and perspectives. It was natural that the people they trained should continue this work. At first they did, making films about the rehabilitation work of UNRRA and UNESCO in *Hungry Minds*, *Suffer Little Children* and *In the Wake of the Armies* — UNRRA, or the war crime trials in *Guilty Men*. Grant McLean was sent to China at the request of UNRRA to make *The People Between*. This type of activity abruptly ceased about 1947 and was never really to be revived until Brittain and Kemeny made *Bethune* in the early sixties. The Board began to retreat into itself to make films that either directly promulgated Liberal policy, (particularly the sweeping social reforms following the war) or films that were standard scenics, or ethnographic films with no overt political overtones.

Furthermore the opposition conservatives had, in the Film Board, a good device with which to attack the government. The Cabinet was suspicious of how many communists were actually at the Board. The opposition found time to question myriad details of the Film Board's operation— from taxicab accounts for Grierson and Legg, to the number of phones the Board has on its premises. Suddenly it came to light that the Film Board had sent an employee to China for a film. It was Grant McLean, nephew of the film commissioner, Ross McLean, and the film he came back with was to provide the next drama.

In February 1945, UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) requested that the Film Board record its work in certain parts of Europe and the Far East. Grant McLean was subsequently sent to China in 1946, where he shot footage of Mao Tse Tung and the communist forces in Yenan, as well as of the Nationalist leaders in Nanking, still embroiled in the civil war raging over the country. *The People Between* portrayed a population caught between these two ideologies. Upon completion of the film, Mike Pearson, at that time Secretary of State for External Affairs, requested that a screening be arranged for him. McLean described what happened in a recent interview:

After the film had been shown, the lights came on, Pearson stood up and said some very nice things about the quality of the film. However he went on to say that the government couldn't allow its release because it indicated, naturally, that there were two governments in China, and he didn't think that Canada should recognize that. Pearson took the view that the Canadian government, I think at the behest of the American government, wouldn't even recognize that the communists existed. It was very unreal, but that was the position that Patrick Hurley and the China lobby was taking in Washington.⁹



Dropping in on an NFB crew, minister of National Health and Welfare Paul Martin chatted with (l. to r.) cameraman Dennis Gillson, producer Bob Anderson, and business manager Henry Clark on the set of *A Feeling of Hostility* in Hull

The People Between was shelved for years, eventually getting occasional distribution to film societies and study groups. The next crisis would not be so easily dealt with. It was a crisis of major proportions which to some extent crystallized many of the previous problems.

The November 19, 1949 issue of *The Financial Post* had as its front-page headline: "Film Board Monopoly Facing Major Test?" The article included a long list of complaints about the Film Board, written from the perspective of the private sector, which had continually argued against the existence of the NFB. Furthermore it revealed that the Department of National Defence was no longer using the Film Board to work on "classified" films. Perhaps most damningly it asked the question: "Is the Film Board a leftist propaganda machine?"

The walls quickly came tumbling in. Questions came thick and fast in parliament. Brooke Claxton, Minister of National Defence, and minister responsible for the NFB from October 1945 to February 1947, admitted that until the Film Board had had its employees screened for security, no classified material would be given to that organization.¹⁰ In fact, the DND films were being given to Crawley and Associated Screen News. Many people felt that Claxton had become deeply suspicious of the NFB during the Gouzenko period, and that the suspicion had never left him. However, the significance of Claxton's statement took on a different dimension when it was revealed that in the case of the private firms, only those personnel directly connected with classified DND films had been screened, while in the case of the Board, every employee in

the organization was to be checked out. Evidently, the government's concern with possible subversion within the NFB went beyond the question of DND films.

This period of the Board's history is one of its darkest. Suspicion and betrayal were rife. Through it all, while it is relatively easy to establish the salient facts, there is a much larger spectre continually in the background.

It seems clear that the attack on the Board represents a concerted effort by a group of small Canadian film producers and laboratories to destroy the Board; and that behind this group stand the most powerful movie interests in the world, located in Hollywood.¹¹

When Ross McLean succeeded Grierson as commissioner in 1945 he was faced with an awesome task. The transition from war to peace would determine the effectiveness of the NFB as an enduring agency. The growing pains were many — staff was reduced and budgets were cut. The Gouzenko affair had planted the fear of communism in people's minds. Furthermore McLean moved the Board into areas where there were powerful and antagonistic interests at work. The small, but vocal group of Canadian film-producing companies expected the Film Board to disappear after the war was won. When it didn't they felt they were facing unfair competition. McLean was also keen on moving the Board into fiction films and television — veiled threats to the hegemony of Hollywood in the former instance, and its fear of the magic box in the latter. Furthermore, McLean had suggested that the Americans should begin

to recognize a certain responsibility vis à vis Canada because of their domination of the market, and quotas were mentioned.¹² McLean had seen through the sham of the Canadian Co-operation Project, and was subsequently removed from any further involvement with the scheme.

The Canadian government had its own complaints. Louis St. Laurent had evidence that NFB employees were providing information to the opposition for use in preparing questions in the Commons. Jack Pickersgill, at that time parliamentary secretary to St. Laurent felt that the Board needed to be disciplined.¹³ In Quebec, Duplessis had ordered his censor board in 1946 to examine Film Board subjects for content sympathetic to communism arguing that: "The National Film Board diffuses Communism and is showing films encouraging Federal centralization."¹⁴ Three years later he stopped all distribution of NFB films in Quebec through one of his provincial agencies, the Bureau de Ciné-photographie, because of the suspected leftist bias of the Board. The interests of the government, Hollywood, and Canada's private producers all coincided — the Board has to be brought down a peg or two, if not totally destroyed.

Ross McLean was the first to go. Conveniently, his term was due to expire in January 1950. It was not to be renewed, although McLean was not officially told this: he found out through the newspapers. His assistant commissioner, Ralph Foster, resigned immediately.

Meanwhile the Board's employees were going through the screening process. McLean had declared the Board a "vulnerable" agency in May 1949 at the behest of DND. Later that autumn the RCMP returned to McLean with a list of about thirty names. It was suggested that he might dismiss them because they were unreliable. McLean refused until clear evidence of disloyalty had been proved. In many cases he told the people involved and warned them that further measures might be in the air, and he might not be able to protect them. McLean was soon to leave the scene. His successor, Arthur Irwin, inherited the problem. (Irwin goes into what transpired, in an interview in another part of this issue in great depth.) Suffice it to say that it was admitted that three people had been fired. Others apparently had already been let go in mid-1949 according to Robert Winters, the minister responsible for the Board. The public sacrifice had been made. There was no outcry. Morale at the Film Board was rock-bottom. Evelyn Spice Cherry described it as a time:

... of tremendous fear. There were these subtle things going on. We weren't accused of anything, but it was suggested that some of us were enemies of our country.¹⁵

Friends became enemies, distrust was rampant. Some simply turned away from involving themselves in the crisis. Information was scanty as to what was, in fact, happening. Irwin moved quickly into other areas. A management consultant company, Woods and Gordon, submitted their report early in 1950. Many of its recommendations were implemented by Irwin. They involved changes in administrative structure, and finance. The Board was becoming more bureaucratized, more efficient. The civil servants could now begin to understand how the place functioned. Grierson's practice of employing everyone on three-month contracts was superseded by more permanent means of employment. But Woods and Gordon's report had another potential use, as Pickersgill explains:

... there had been a security investigation of the employees of the Film Board, to which no publicity had been given because it was hoped the suspicions about a few employees would not be justified. Winters was the minister responsible for the Film Board, and when he wisely turned to St. Laurent for advice Norman Robertson and I were asked to assist him. In addition to the security investigation, we felt that there should be a review of the administration of the Board which might indicate that changes in personnel could be made without injury to individual reputations.¹⁶

A new Film Act was drafted and passed into law on June 30, 1950. The Chairman of the Board was now to be the film commissioner, and of eight other members, only three were to be public servants — there were to be no Cabinet ministers. The political and parliamentary contact that Grierson so valued was being dismantled. It had created too much controversy. Irwin began to investigate a new home for the Film Board. In Ottawa the Board was too close to the firing range. Montreal was chosen. This would have unforeseen results. The idea was relatively sound, but the eventual site chosen was disastrous. It was miles from the centre of town, and isolated from the creative core.

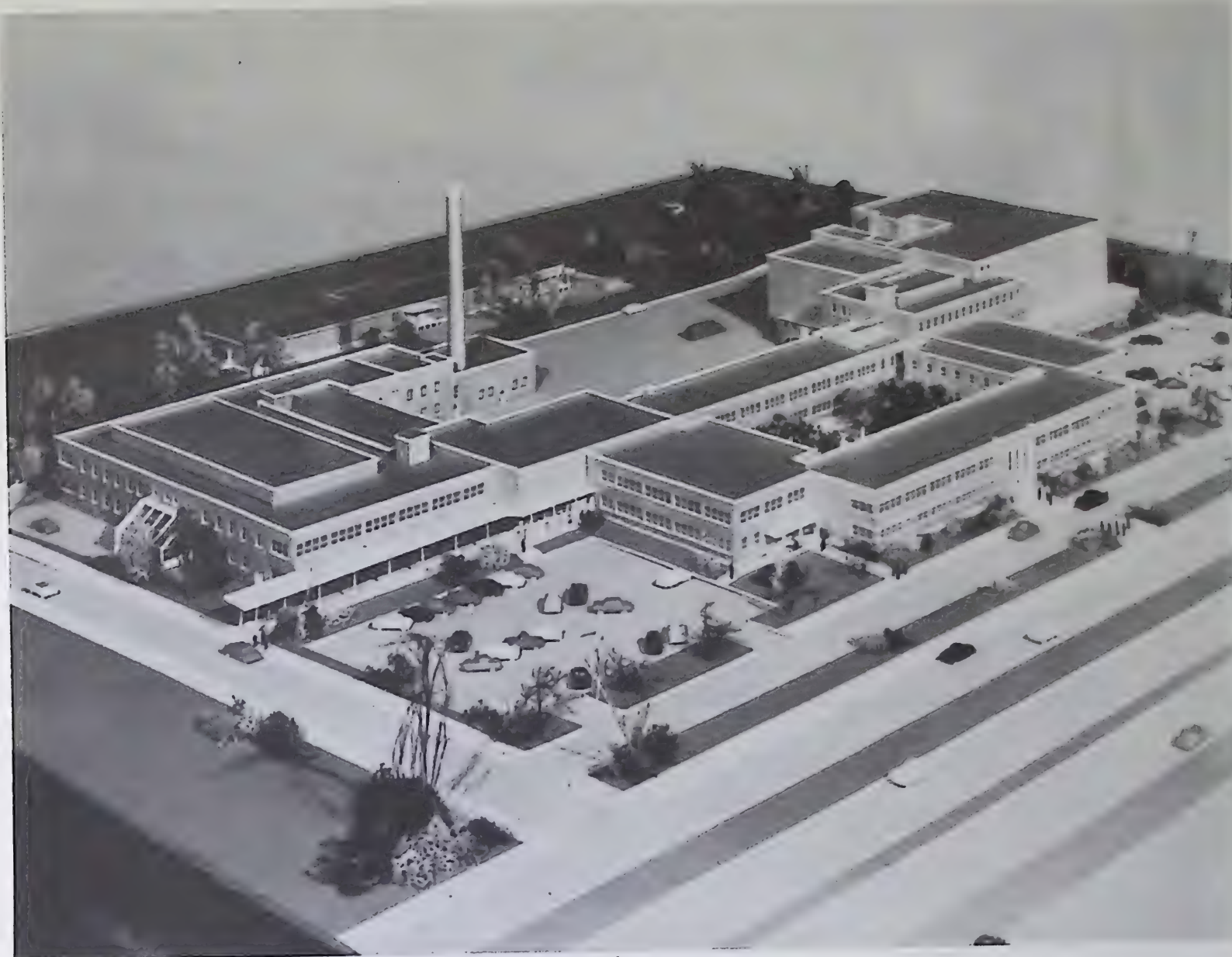
Late in 1950, Irwin wrote a letter to Vincent Massey, chairman of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. It explained the reason the Film Board was requesting more money from parliament:

The principal increase is an item of \$250,000 asked for the production of films to be used in the battle of ideas between the Communist and non-Communist world. The view was taken that the current conflict between the East and West was essentially a struggle of ideas, that the film medium was one of the most effective for expressing the ideas for which this country stood, and that this country was in a uniquely favourable position to operate in this field not being subject to the suspicion which is sometimes directed against our neighbour...¹⁷

Window dressing? Perhaps. But it was a reflection of how far the Board had come in a couple of years. The program became known variously as the "Freedom" series, or "Freedom Speaks," and "Democracy at Work." Although it was felt that the whole concept was three or four years out of date, two people, Guy Glover and James Cowan, were sent to Europe to study distribution problems for the series. Various films were made, or co-opted into the programme, but the scheme gradually died a quiet, innocuous death.

People left the Board, and new employees arrived to ultimately leave their stamp on the place. But as Evelyn Spice Cherry reflected:

The whole nature of the Film Board changed. When one doesn't wish to fire people, you create conditions under which the worker, if he or she has any self-respect, is eventually forced to resign. And I'm sure this was a method that was used. There is a trend to seek a form of escapism from controversial subject matters and certainly it prevailed among us. And if it's carried very far you almost get into a condition of 'nothingness.' I really do believe that when you're terribly preoccupied with what a camera can do to create a lot of very beautiful images, you end up with something that really hasn't much to say — you have reached a period of nothingness.¹⁸



Architect's model of the National Film Board complex built in Montreal

An extreme view perhaps. After all, the artistic flowering of Unit B in films like Paul Tomkowicz: *Street-railway Switchman*, *Corral*, *City of Gold* and *Lonely Boy* was just around the corner. The québécois filmmakers would make great strides in *cinéma-vérité* and go on to challenge the status quo in the sixties. *Challenge for Change* would deal with many specific social, economic and political issues through its films. To a certain extent, it is amazing what can be made at the Board, the freedom that is allowed people. Leaving aside questions of objectivity and bias, one cannot, however, ignore a drift towards self-censorship. This is arguably the most dangerous kind, because it is extremely difficult to perceive and can invariably be rationalized away. Self-censorship in a publicly-funded, government agency is unavoidable. But how far can one go before restraint is imposed? Where are the limits to freedom of expression, and who establishes and enforces these largely indefinable parameters? Is one actively encouraged to make films on the borderline, so to speak; or, alternatively, to tread a safer path, away from controversy. A few films have actively explored these limits. But the question remains: if a filmmaker explores the contradictions and mechanisms of his society, how far can he go with his criticism before he is censured? Especially if he is using the taxpayer's money for his purposes. □

1. William Johnson: Nothing's changed since Duplessis maker of banned film says. *The Globe and Mail*, December 27, 1972.
2. Ibid.
3. Ontario Archives, RG 3 Box 303. Letter from J. J. Fitzgibbons to Hon. M.F. Hepburn, February 17, 1940.
4. Public Archives Canada, MG 26 J4, Vol. 273. Memorandum from Walter Turnbull to WLM King, March 2, 1939.
5. Ontario Archives, RG 3 Box 218. Memo to O.J. Silverthorne.
6. Unidentified newspaper article.
7. *Canadian Film Weekly*, July 28, 1943 p. 1.
8. *Hansard*, March 30, 1944, p. 2017-18. Mr Adamson.
9. Interview with Grant McLean for *Has Anybody Here Seen Canada?*, February 24, 1978.
10. *Hansard*. November 18, 1949, p. 1976.
11. *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, February 4, 1950.
12. Public Archives Canada, RG 27, Vol. 852. Letter from Ross McLean to J.J. McCann, December 1, 1947.
13. Personal interview with J.W. Pickersgill, February 1978.
14. *Canadian Film Weekly*, April 10, 1946, p. 1.
15. Interview with Evelyn Spice Cherry for *Has Anybody Here Seen Canada?*, December 19, 1977.
16. J.W. Pickersgill. *My Years with Louis St. Laurent*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto and Buffalo, 1975. p. 146.
17. Public Archives Canada, RG 33/28 Vol. 55. Letter from W. Arthur Irwin to Honourable Vincent Massey, October 30, 1950.
18. Interview with Evelyn Spice Cherry for *Has Anybody Here Seen Canada?*

the first canadian film awards



Waiting for the announcements of their First Prizes were Bob Anderson (third from left-non theatrical category) and Budge Crawley (third from right-First Film of the Year) at the 1st Canadian Film Awards

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Canadian Film Awards which were first presented in 1949 for films produced in 1948. The following is a report of the First Awards ceremony, originally published in Canadian Film News. Judges were Dorothy Burritt, Moira Armour, Robert Eves, Ian MacNeill and Gerald Pratley. The organizing committee included Don Buchanan, Jim Beveridge, Budge Crawley, Graham McInnes and Walter Herbert.

Four hundred people — filmmakers, distributors and users — gathered by invitation to the Elgin Theatre in Ottawa last month, saw the presentation of the first Canadian Film Awards.

Few have referred to the Canadian Awards as a cousin of the Hollywood Oscar, nor was there any touch of Hollywood about the presentation ceremo-

ny. Enthusiasm was well contained. No red carpet stretched from curb to lobby, no crowd surged forward in search of a star, and among dawdlers outside the theatre doors no constellation of cigars advertised a conclave of press and publicity agents. Dress was ordinary ("optional" — said the invitation), voices were controlled and there was no bank of flowers.

For the casual passerby the event which for the first time recognized Canadian talent in filmmaking was as decorous as prize day at Sunday school. But for the participants this was it — Canadian Films had arrived.

In the theatre lobby, 34 year old Roby J. Kidd, pilot of the event, (and assistant director of the Canadian Association of Adult Education which launched the award) welcomed guests,

introduced out-of-town guests and presented programs. Programs were mimeographed — 8 pages of text with no ads and no encomiums.

Producers, directors, script writers, sound-men, music composers and animation artists passed through the lobby in small groups. Sponsors, distributors, advertising agency representatives and trade-paper reporters dallied in the lighted mezzanine passing the good word, swapping congratulations, ringing up an occasional good-natured quip.

Now the lobby cleared. Those still arriving made no pause but hastened into the theatre. Up front the award winners settled down for the speeches.

In his opening remarks, the chairman Dr. H.L. Keenleyside, deputy minister of Mines and Resources, described the event as an important con-

tribution to "the cultural side of our civilization". The Reconstruction and Supply Minister, Robert Winters acting on behalf of the Prime Minister presented the awards. Youth predominated — one or two animation artists might have been high school boys. Here was Stanley Jackson, former school teacher, winner of the award in the theatrical class of short subjects. Still surprised that his somewhat tentative probing of a touchy subject — teaching — had been accepted theatrically, Jackson read what his program had to say about *Who Will Teach Your Child?*... "The significance of good teaching, more than ever needed in our modern complex society, is developed in a challenging fashion."

There were other challengers. A few seats away Robert Anderson who had made several film essays from the problems of twisted personalities. His *Drug Addict* with his *The Feeling of Hostility*, divided the judges and was awarded a joint "first" in the non-theatrical class. The first of these two was the film criticized by some United States authorities who disagreed with the principle that drug addicts are sick people needing sympathy and treatment rather than ostracism and jail.

Jackson and Anderson are both NFB producer-director-scripters of films on the more involved social-problems category. Both are in mid-thirties, both graduates of prairie universities. Nearby is Leon Shelly, *Beans of Bounty* producer, whose film on soybean propagation placed him with Anderson as a winner in the non-theatrical class. The judges deemed the Shelley film an excellent example of fine quality and good taste in a commercially sponsored documentary film.

French language production was represented by Jean-Paul Ladouceur, a National Film Board director-animator and Paul L'Anglais, Quebec Productions producer. Ladouceur's *Chantons Noël*, award winner in the animated film group, is largely paper sculpture (puppets) illustrating several French-Canadian carols. Ladouceur is 27, a graduate of Beaux-Arts, Montreal. This is his first puppet film. Paul L'Anglais — *Un Homme et son Péché* (A Man and His Sin) — said the program "is different, exciting, and Canadian." It is L'Anglais' first major success and has already recovered production costs from box-office receipts in Quebec province.

Of all the award winners waiting for the presentations, the Crawleys of Ottawa were best prepared with F.R. Crawley's *Loon's Necklace*, the film singled out for honours at the Second International Festival of Documentary Films in Edinburgh. The Imperial Oil Company of Canada had purchased Canadian distribution rights and placed the film at the disposal of the Canadian Education Association. Encyclopedia Britannica had contracted for world rights outside Canada. Now it was to be awarded first of the year for Canada. For the Crawleys, a filmmaking family, the moment was in the nature of a hometown reception following on foreign conquest.

There were others there. Gordon Sparling, producer of the Associated Screen News Cameo series of theatrical news-shorts, awarded honorable mention for good editing, wise selection of items, and general skill in technique. Louis Shore and Mrs. Dorothy Burritt, clever amateurs, given honourable mention for their entries *Making A Life Mask* and *Suite Two*, respectively. Of all in the theatre's front row, perhaps, the NFB's experimenter Norman McLaren

was most intent. His work which avoids the customary content of films — people, things, places — and the normal mechanics of filmmaking — the camera, klieg lights, sound track and direction, has gone unhonoured in Canada, although in Locarno, Cannes, Edinburgh and New York it had captured the imagination of the initiated. McLaren makes the pictures directly on film with pen or brush. Lately he had even drawn sound producing a "weird" "music" reminiscent of bronchial bullfrogs. *Dots and Loops* (special award winner with *Un Homme et son Péché*) is noted for "humour and charm", and represents a method of filmmaking, personal and independent in the extreme. No camera made the pictures, no microphone recorded the sound — all came from the pens or brushes of the artist.

These were the people who faced the platform, who tonight were being honored, who were representative of the best in the Canadian film industry. Young pioneers each in his own field. Canadian-born and taught, these were the people whose work perhaps more than any other native art creation was best known at home and abroad. □



Dress was "optional" at the 1948 Canadian Film Awards when Dr. H.L. Keenleyside, Robert Winters and 34-year-old Roby J. Kidd, pilot of the event, gathered in Ottawa's Elgin Theatre lobby to welcome guests

cooperation, hollywood and howe

by maynard collins

Historian Donald Creighton, in *The Forked Road, Canada 1939-1957* disposes of the Liberal budget of November 17, 1947 in two sentences. For the Canadian film industry, however, that budget began a bizarre story of government, civil service and industry collusion and approval of a plan whereby Canada traded its emerging post-war film industry for a few mentions of Canada in bad American feature films and a couple of tourist plugs in some American shorts. The whole premise of the plan is so ludicrous that it is hard to take seriously, to believe that we Canadians were so naive, so easily flim-flamed by Hollywood. But the "Canadian Cooperation Project" lasted a decade, and it did not die by government fiat, nor by industry lobbying, nor by consumer pressure, but simply because economic conditions changed and everybody forgot about it. The basis of the plan which began 33 years ago is painfully clear.

The war was over, but the summer of 1946 the million men and fifty thousand women in uniform overseas had returned to Canada. Coca-Cola plants were going up all over Europe. Canadian industrial capacity was converting to peace-time use. The British economy was in shambles. Canadians scrambled to buy all the newly-available consumer goods they had been denied throughout a depression and a world war. The Canadian dollar was re-pegged at par with the American dollar. The Canadian economy was basically healthy.

But it was caught in a strange bind. The post-war Canadian appetite for consumer goods was creating an imbalance of currencies, for Canadian purchases in the US had to be paid for in cash, while its sales to the war-crippled countries of Europe

had to be financed on credit. In order to prevent a devaluation of the dollar, in his budget of November 17, 1947 Acting Finance Minister Douglas Abbott was forced to announce sweeping quotas, taxes, and import restrictions, including a ban on the importation of American-made film projection and sound equipment.

For the time being, no move was made by Canada to restrict the remittance of film earnings to the US. Everyone expected some sort of legislation, though, for there was a big prize at stake: \$20 million dollars in foreign earnings from Canadian movie houses, of which \$17 million went to the US.

In anticipation of government restrictions on American film earnings, the Film Producers Association of Canada (Crawley Films, Audio Pictures, Quebec Productions, Queensway (Rank) Studios, Shelly Films, Trans-Canada Films, Thatcher Film Productions, Cinema-Canada and North American Productions) met with Abbott on November 24, 1947 and outlined a plan to use part of the money to increase the Association's production facilities by 50 percent in order to create a strong Canadian feature film and documentary industry. N.F.B. Commissioner Ross McLean offered a plan whereby the American film industry would be forced to spend \$4-5 million of its Canadian earnings in Canada, as well as opening American distribution to 40 or 50 Canadian shorts.

But the game was not only making movies, it was international finance, and the Americans played smooth but heavy. Eric Johnston, president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) immediately set up a lobby group to pressure Ottawa against any government action against Hollywood.



At the head table of a dinner given in honor of Adolph Zukor at Paramount Pictures' Canadian Annual Sales Meeting in Toronto were (l. to r.) J. J. Fitzgibbons, president of Famous Players, George Peters, vice-president of Odeon, Zukor and five other guests



"The film industry does not, in our opinion, lend itself to quotas," maintained C.D. Howe, minister of reconstruction and supply

The lobby committee included Francis Harmon, vice-president of the MPAA and J.J. Fitzgibbons, president of Famous Players Canada.

The wooing of the Canadian politicians began after a meeting between Fitzgibbons and American-born C.D. Howe, Minister of Reconstruction and Supply, at a luncheon at the Rider Club in January 14, 1948. Fitzgibbons and Harmon met with Donald Gordon, Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, Lester Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ernest Bushnell of the CBC, and others.

Here the Canadian Cooperation Project was launched, to lay to rest all talk of quotas, taxes, fees, remittances, or freezes.

On January 21, 1948, Johnston wrote a letter to Fitzgibbons, outlining the basic aims of the Project:

1. To make a short film explaining Canada's trade-dollar problem to American and Canadian audiences;
2. To increase coverage of Canadian subjects in American newsreels;
3. To have some short films about Canada made by US film companies;
4. To obtain distribution of some NFB films in America;
5. To insert some Canadian sequences in US feature films;
6. To make a series of radio recordings by US stars extolling the virtues of Canada as a vacationland;
7. To distribute fewer "low-toned" gangster films in Canada and
8. To appoint a staff man for liaison of the Project.

Not too much for \$17,000,000.

The key personnel of the CCP were: in New York — Eric Johnston, President of the MPAA; Francis Harmon, Vice-President; and, Taylor Mills, New York co-ordinator. In Hollywood — Blake Owensmith, whose function was to insert Canadian references in Hollywood features whenever possible. In Toronto — Don Henshaw, of MacLaren Advertising Agency,

who co-ordinated the plan in Canada. Two other persons were also key to the success of the Project, although not officially a part: J.J. Fitzgibbons of Famous Players, which was owned by Paramount Pictures, acted as a conduit of information between Canada and the US, and organized certain distribution and exhibition aspects of the CCP; and later, Laurence A. Steinhardt, the newly-appointed Ambassador to Canada from the US, transmitted information from Parliament Hill to Toronto, New York and Hollywood and offered advice on lobbying and negotiations.

Somehow, C.D. Howe, who never mis-read a balance sheet, didn't seem to quite understand what he had agreed to. In various speeches to the House of Commons he mentioned a 'quid pro quo' (prompting one Opposition member to reply "The only 'quid pro quo' that would interest us . . . would be . . . United States dollars"), "the development of production in Canada," and "contracts . . . covering some \$2 - \$3 million of feature production in Canada." Not surprisingly, these remarks prompted expectations of a great boom in Canadian film production. What he was asked if any 'quid pro quo' would reduce the balance of payments by 100 percent, he stated: "The objective may be that, but we will settle for less." In fact, Canada settled for one hundred per cent less, and in return for exempting motion pictures from restrictions received only a few mentions of Canada in some American feature films, a few Hollywood-made tourist films on the beauty of skiing in Banff, skating in Quebec and fishing in Northern Ontario, and the sale of a few stock shots of Canada to US producers.

Howe, who admitted he himself did not go to the movies, set film policy for a long line of Canadian cabinet ministers when he said, "The film industry does not, in our opinion, lend itself to quotas." It is easy to imagine the ghost of Howe intoning this line again and again into the dreams of a succession of Liberal Secretaries of State.

With Howe, unwittingly or not, leading the way, most analysts expected a great increase in Canadian film production, even the beginning of a real features industry in this country. The MPAA, while set up for the very purpose of preventing such an occurrence, was not above empty promises of a film crew in every garage. At a lavish New York luncheon for Donald Gordon, Deputy Minister of the Bank of Canada, Taylor Mills, MPAA co-ordinator of the Project, announced a ten-picture deal between Renaissance Studios and Monogram Pictures. Audio Pictures of Toronto opened a new studio in anticipation of increased production. Eagle-Lion announced two productions to be shot near Calgary, with a budget of \$2 1/2 million.

Of course, none of these deals, nor others announced, ever got off the ground. As far as Hollywood was concerned, the CCP was only a plan whereby American companies would make a few tourist films. Already American producers had been forced to liquidate blocked dollars in at least six foreign countries — Italy, France, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Australia — by producing films there or by sending location companies over. They had no intention of doing the same in Canada; they wanted that \$17 million going untouched into the USA.

Negotiations continued through the early months of 1948. In April, Fitzgibbons, Francis Harmon, Taylor Mills of New York and Blake Owensmith of Hollywood arrived in Ottawa for some serious lobbying. This culminated in a luncheon in the Quebec Suite of the Chateau Laurier, where the purposes of the

CCP were outlined to the guests and examples of Project endeavours were listed: Calgary Stampede, Snow Capers and Big Game Angling.

The luncheon was a star-studded affair. Representing Hollywood and Washington were Harmon, Fitzgibbons, and US Ambassador Ray Atherton. Being fatted for the kill were the heavyweights of the Liberal Party and many top-ranked mandarins of the civil service, from Trade and Commerce, the Dept. of Finance, External Affairs, the Bank of Canada, the Foreign Exchange Control Board and National Revenue, including Howe, Abbott, Graham Towers, Louis Rasminsky, J.J. McCann and Lester Pearson, all bright stars of the post-war public service stewardship of Canada.

The Canadian government bought the MPAA plan, and all talk of increased Canadian film production came to a halt. Howe and Hollywood were now in agreement on the limited purpose of the plan: in exchange for leaving the \$17 million alone, tourism and Canada would be boosted by inserting as many plugs for Canada in as many American films as possible.

In July, 1948, there had been some communications problems between Hollywood and Ottawa which came to the attention of Howe, so he appointed Archibald H. Newman as liaison man for the Project. His duties were to keep the various aspects of the plan moving smoothly and to puff up the mostly intangible results. Newman set to work putting the record straight: the CCP was not intended to increase Canadian production, he announced, and the Canadian government would "not put a quota on the films of any nation." In the CCP report of 1949, he stripped all sham from the Project and admitted that "at no time has the industry specifically agreed to make films in Canada."

The position of American Ambassador, Lawrence Steinhardt, became an interesting one. Although he was not officially a part of the CCP team, he took an active part in the lobbying process, supplying political intelligence to the US film industry and becoming very chummy with Howe. Possibly he had added incentive to his task, in as much as his family had financial interest in the Warner Bros. studios.

In late 1949, Howe's exchange of confidences with Steinhardt was to land Newman in some hot water within the CCP. In August, Newman had gone to Howe complaining that some American companies were stalling on their commitment to the Project. Howe passed this information on to Steinhardt, who then wrote to Harmon in New York, warning him of the possible consequences if the company (in this case Twentieth Century-Fox) didn't at least appear to comply: "I would be derelict in my duties were I to fail to invite your attention to the fact unless all the members of the Association take immediate measures to satisfy the Canadian authorities that each of them is participating wholeheartedly in the Canadian Cooperation Project, all the members of the Association must be prepared for the imposition of restrictions on the import of American motion pictures into Canada, or, in the alternative, be prepared to have at least a part of their earnings in Canada frozen." Steinhardt advised Harmon to set everything else aside and run up to Ottawa to assess the political feeling and take the necessary steps to correct the situation.

The lobbying was successful and the Project was dutifully renewed for another year. Newman was soundly rebuked by Taylor Mills for getting the CCP caught up "in the maelstrom of his personal anxiety," and Steinhardt was informed by Howe the next week that Newman was about to be "super-



Members of the Canadian Co-operation Project gather to lay to rest all talk of quotas, taxes, fees, remittances or freezes: J. J. Fitzgibbons, Mrs. Owensmith, Blake Owensmith, Leslie Chance and N. Frank Freeman

ceded," perhaps to be replaced by Fitzgibbons. However, opposition to the Project never really became organized or effective and it was dutifully renewed each year until 1957, when it mercifully and quietly disappeared. The original monetary crisis which spawned the CCP had lasted six months; the CCP, itself almost a decade.

The results: well, the figures on US tourism in Canada are inconclusive. Viewed one way, they indicate a rise in the number of American tourists, but a smaller percentage increase than tourism from other countries. Comparing Canadian tourists travelling in the US against Americans in Canada, this country suffered a net loss in tourism revenue during the period the CCP was in operation.

Canada was mentioned in a number of American features, usually as a place where gangsters had fled to or where couples had honeymooned. Blake Owensmith had dutifully made the rounds of the studios each day, persuading writers to insert Canadian plugs wherever possible, such as the famous line about "red-winged orioles from Canada" that Jimmy Stewart cannot say with a straight face in *Bend of the River*, or the "mountaineer from Winnipeg" in *Three Secrets*.

The lessons of the CCP are painfully clear. A nation was so mesmerized by the glamour of Hollywood, by Shirley Temple, by Jimmy Stewart and by Mary Pickford, that it would trade a chance to begin to create its own cultural identity on film for a position as a footnote to the American identity. Even cabinet ministers were not immune: after Robert Winters, Minister of Resources and Development was squired about Hollywood, the CCP was able to say that "we... have sewed him up tight 100 percent on the project... We will certainly have a very strong man in our corner in the Cabinet for any future matter..." Beware Canadian civil servants who visit Hollywood!

Of course, we are all so much more sophisticated now. Our Department of External Affairs knows much more about international dealings that it did in 1946. Doesn't it? We would never trade a personal, Canadian cultural filmic identity to tag along on productions from other countries. Would we? Canadian films now can compete on an equal basis with imported products in our own market. Can't they? Thank God we have progressed so much in thirty years. □

a view from the top



"The basic job was to restore public confidence in the Board," said Arthur Irwin of his term as film commissioner

Interview with Arthur Irwin, Government Film Commissioner, 1950-53.

When Arthur Irwin took over as head of the National Film Board in early 1950 the Board was in a state of crisis. It was under threat as harbouring "security risks" and under attack by the commercial film industry. When he left (to become High Commissioner to Australia) the Board had a new, and more effective Film Act, its operations had been consolidated and the move to new studios in Montreal was well underway. In the following edited transcript of an interview with Mr Irwin he describes how he approached his job and the changes he initiated.

In the original interview, Mr. Irwin begins by describing how, when he was still Editor of Macleans, he was persuaded to head the NFB by Robert Winters, Lester Pearson, Norman Robertson and, finally, prime Minister Louis St. Laurent. Ross McLean, the Commissioner, had already been advised that he would not be re-appointed; NFB staff morale was low and there was some resentment that an "outsider" knowing nothing of film should have been brought in.

I should elaborate on what the basis of the employment was: in the first instance I had a firm commitment with the government that they were going to maintain the Film Board. In the second place, I would be responsible for the reorganization which was being planned from various directions. But the basic job, my initial job, was to restore public confidence in the Board.

I had to approach this against the broad background of the Board. The Board was suffering at the time from the deflation following on the war: it had gone up to a tremendous peak in the war, made a great reputation for itself and after the war the appropriations and the staff had been cut by about a third. It was under vicious attack by the private film industry who claimed that it was taking the bread out of their mouths and wanted to put it out of business. It was under political attack in the House, on the grounds of being wasteful and extravagant. It was even under attack by departments of government, its sponsors, who claimed that the Board didn't perform efficiently and was charging too much and was arrogant in ordering departments around. And then there was of course the

security business, which was very much in the public's mind.

The *Financial Post* had run an article in which they said that the Defence Department wouldn't give the Board any classified material for processing. Naturally, Brooke Claxton, the Defence Minister, was questioned in the House and he came out flatly and said that it was quite true, the Board was being surveyed for security purposes, and until it was cleared, the Defence Department was not able to give it any classified material. As matter of fact this was discussed in great detail when the government was negotiating with me and I had laid down certain specifications in relation to this, one of which was that I wouldn't accept the premise of guilt by association. I asked for the right to cross-examine the secret police. I said that there might be some security risks, but there would probably be some just plain damn fools, and possibly some incompetence. If any action was taken in relation to two or three, it had to be separated in time from any action taken in relation to one, and this was agreed together with the RCMP Inspector who was in charge of this kind of operation at the time. He had all his dossiers but he couldn't give me the papers because it would have exposed the names of his undercover agents. We had a police stenographer there, and he would read the dossier of an individual, leaving out the names of the undercover agent, and they were taken down and then subsequently I would be handed the report of what he told me of the dossier. . . and then the next day when I'd had chance to get the copy I'd cross-examine him on it. About the end of the second day we had a blow-up. He got quite shirty and said, look, you make me feel as if I'm accused in the witness box and you're a prosecuting attorney. I'm not going to stand for this sort of thing. Now look, I said... you and I have got one objective in common, we're just trying to get at the facts of the situation. This is the way I'm approaching it and I think you can see the reasonableness of it, now let's get on with it. When it was all through, I took the whole list, the whole 36, and it was a very difficult business, one of the worst jobs I ever had to tackle in my life, I didn't like it at all. But at any rate, I decided there seemed to be three clear cases of people who could be real security risks — the rest, no... there were all kinds of people, there had been people who had been foolish, there was one fellow who'd got up and heckled Jimmy Gardner the Minister of Agriculture in Saskatchewan. This fellow was a prominent CCF'er, and of course in the minds of some people he was a communist. And there were radicals and people with unconventional views. This was a free country and they had a perfect right to these views. Finally, I took the whole 36 names to Norman Robertson (Clerk of the Privy Council), who was then the civilian head of security. I said, here they are Norman, take a look, see what you think. A couple of days later he came back and he'd picked the same three that I'd picked. I hadn't told him in advance. And then of course we had to go to the Minister, and he agreed and that was it. I think that process was concluded before the end of February and in March the Minister announced that three people had been discharged. That was tough for me. I had to bring these boys in, and all I said was I'm very sorry but as you know this had been declared a vulnerable agency, and I hadn't been able to satisfy myself that you're the kind of person that should be employed in that agency. I must say that to their credit they accepted this, but I was never really easy. I'm not sure this is the way to handle the security problems. Should these fellows have had a chance to defend them-

selves in public, should they have been charged in public? Or should it be handled in this way without any publicity at all? I'm not sure what was the right way; at any rate that's the way it was done.

And then there were other problems. The first thing, of course, was the general state of morale in the Board. The Board at the time felt that I was a Toronto businessman who know nothing about the film business, had never indicated any interest in the Film Board. Why would I be there? The real reason in their minds was that I was going to scupper the damned outfit. I was known as the hatchet man. They kept referring to me as the businessman from Toronto, as if I had never had anything to do with any creative process. But, at any rate, obviously this had to be dealt with and the first thing I did was I deliberately toured the whole works to look at the physical set-up, and to meet as many people as I could, let them see me, that I didn't have horns growing. The Board was then scattered in ten buildings in and around Ottawa, with the main production being done in a ramshackle old mill on John Street on the Ottawa. Some of the things I saw absolutely shocked me: the state of the organization, the legal basis and so on was in some cases non-existent. John Street was a terrible fire trap, the fire marshall and the police people who were responsible for the job had told the government over and over again that if it was a private operation they'd have had it padlocked. At that time the Board had 137 tons of accumulated film going away back to 1914, about 2/3 of which was on old nitrate stock, which as you know is not only inflammable but when it decomposes, as it does, it's explosive. John Street was loaded with it. This terrified the living daylights out of me and the first thing I did was to order an immediate and continuing inspection of all the vaults, cleaned out the cutting rooms as much as I could and had continuous inspection of the cutting rooms and the vaults and everything. To my real shock the first inspection revealed two cans of this old film decomposed and ready to blow, sitting right there in John Street. I remember also going down in February to Middle Street which was a store and inspection place and they had a little space heater in the front end of the lower floor, and that's all the heat there was in the building. It was a great big long thing, and in the back, up in the top end of the second floor were girls with gloves on, their winter coats on trying to inspect film. I went back down and said what the hell is this all about? Well, they said, we've been trying for three years to get them to heat that building and they say that they can't afford it and won't afford it. So I called Public Works and I said I'd been down there and I asked them about this and they gave me the same story. So I said, well, look, I've seen that today — this is Monday, if you don't have those space heaters to heat that building in by Saturday, on Monday next I'm calling in the press to inspect the premises so that they can see how the Government of Canada treats its employees. The heaters were in by Friday.

I was very fortunate because before my appointment was announced, the Minister had appointed Walter Gordon to do a survey of the organization of the Board. They had started in November and brought in their report I think it was in March, and made a series of recommendations in regard to the structure, staffing, financing and accounting. And they also included recommendations that the Board be put in one building in Ottawa, with modern equipment, etc. This was a tremendous advantage to me. As a matter of fact I talked to Walter



Arthur Irwin (r.) and his wife visited the NFB's new building (under construction, l.) and are greeted by Film Commissioner Dr. A. W. Trueman



They were, well, they were active, they had their unit, and so on, but they didn't really feel at home in the Board. The Board was really an Anglo Board. The French filmmakers were making some very good films but their strength was not what I thought it ought to be in relation to the Board as a whole. I was fortunate enough to be able to persuade Gratien Gélinas, who was then the principle figure in the French Canadian theatrical world in Quebec, to go on the new board of governors. I was also looking for someone in the Board itself on the French side who might, you know, be pushed up towards the top, and one day Len Chatwin introduced me to a laddie named Pierre Juneau and I had a chat with him and got the notion that here was a prospect. So when Jim Beveridge left the Board he was made Secretary and he, as you know, became head of the whole French side of the Board.

Gordon before the report was brought down and we had discussed some of the matters that he had covered in his report. I knew what was going on, and so one of the first things for them to do was try and get the new structure set up and staff it, and this was very difficult, frankly. When it came to Director of Production, at that time there wasn't one. The Board was divided up into I think five film units and there seemed to be two leading candidates: Jim Beveridge and Don Mulholland. Now Jim had seniority; he had been chairman of the Producers' Committee and he was a respected leader in that group and was obviously and certainly a candidate. Don, on the other hand, was on the theatrical side — I think at that time he was in charge of *The Eye Witness* series and perhaps the *Newsreels*, and they were two very different types. Jim was gentle, tentative, and awfully attractive fellow, given to generalities rather than specifics. Don, on the other hand, was a bit sardonic, a bit aloof — some people even thought he was cynical, but a very practical man with an organizing type of mind. I finally came to the conclusion that Don was the man. And of course when I announced this there was another blow-up. The Grierson phalanx of which Jim was the figure-head, just rose up in wrath — now it was Irwin and Mulholland who were going to destroy the National Film Board but Jim took it very well. I suggested that he take over the London Office — give him another situation of some prestige, and he accepted that very graciously, and there was no problem with Jim himself. But it was not easy for Don. He had to establish himself as the administrative head of a group which had been his peer group and this is always very, very difficult.

Another thing that bothered me very much at the time was the status of the French speaking filmmakers in the Board.

The New Film Act

The next big issue was a new film act, a firm legal basis for the whole operation. At first we thought of amending the old act and then that obviously became impossible so we rewrote a new act. I worked with a chap called Dave Mundell in the Justice Department on this for quite a long period of time and there were discussions all over the place, almost everybody got into the act. I mean the act of writing the Act and it did a number of things. It really was based on the Woods-Gordon report in terms of structure and it firmly nailed down the fact that the Government was going to stay in the film business. It took the Ministers of the Crown off the Board in order to get the political element out of it (there had been two on the eight-member Board up until that time) and the Board itself would have a majority of people from outside the government service. The film commissioner was to be both Chairman of the Board and its Chief Executive Officer. Having the majority outside meant it was very difficult for political pressures from the Government to be exercised.

The Board was given the right to formulate policy, subject to the approval of the Minister of course, and was authorized to perform all functions pertaining to the production and distribution of films which had been in doubt before. It was

authorized to do its own accounting on a business basis. It was given a decent working capital appropriation which was permanent. It was given the right to retain revenue that it received. In my mind this was very important because I was one of those who believed that monetary incentive was a factor in doing a job of any kind, and if the boys knew that a good job got wide distribution, and the Board was getting some return, which would enable them to do more work, it was better than having the money drained off to the general revenue fund. In fact there was more money for the Board to operate, and also the filmmakers had some measure of ascertaining how successful they were in the tough commercial world apart from the non-theatrical distribution, which of course was very highly developed. We also got the right to hire our own staff, either on a permanent basis or on a term contract basis. Prior to that they had to rehire the whole staff every three months and actually there was one girl who did nothing but write reports to Treasury rehiring everybody on the Film Board every three months. Of course this was all swept away in the new Act. Then there were also provisions made for staff pensions.

The Move to Montreal

Then, my next question was the building. Here was an outfit with ten extraordinarily varied buildings, both on John Street and Bank Street, and it was impossible to operate efficiently. You had seven operating businesses with Accounting here, Administration there, Production over here, Distribution over there, separated in some cases by miles — it made no sense. So it was perfectly obvious that if you're going to run the Board you had to have a decent centralized establishment from which you could operate, and this was accepted by the Massey Commission which was sitting at the time. It was also recommended by the Woods-Gordon report. In other words the Government had all kinds of support for a decision to provide a new building, which was their intention, but the question was — *Where?* Up until that time apparently nobody had asked this question: Where should the Film Board be? They just assumed it would just be in Ottawa. As a matter of fact there was a great set of plans for the building of a great monumental building down in Tunney's Pasture, but it never came to anything in any way. I began to ask myself where this operation should be, where in the country. Slowly I came to the conclusion that it shouldn't be in Ottawa at all, that it should be some place else. Ottawa at that time was a relatively small town. It was a Civil Service town, the society was stereotyped, conservative, conventional. The Board depended for its success on the effectiveness with which the creative people operated, and as you know, creative people are anything but conventional. They tend to be radical, they tend to be unconventional in their behaviour, even their clothes — plump women came to work in purple slacks — for God's sake, purple slacks in a Government office in 1950. The result was that the Board at that time was a bit of a pariah; it didn't behave properly, it was irregular, there were sex irregularities, and all kinds of things, but this was quite normal in a creative group. So it seemed to me that the obvious thing was to get it somewhere where it wouldn't be so bloody conspicuous. The tension between the majority environment and the little minority of these creative people, who felt they were despised and rejected and not understood, had developed into, if I may say so (although some of the boys who were there at the time might resent the term), almost a state of collective paranoia. They

reacted against the criticisms of themselves and they reacted against the establishment, and they even reacted against the government of which they were part. So, it seemed to me the thing to do was to get them out in some place where they wouldn't be exposed to this kind of environment, but that was only one factor. The other factor was that if the establishment stayed in Ottawa it seemed to me that it would become a bureaucracy and go dead, it would go stagnant, just become part of the civil service bureaucracy. For its own sake it should be in a metropolitan city where there is a congregation of creative people of all kinds with whom they'd have to compete. Also, it should be in or near a pool of creative talent, on which you could draw on a contract basis and not have to have an enormous permanent staff. There are two reasons for this: one is to get a constant stream of new blood and new ideas coming into the institution and the other is to build up a great bureaucratic establishment or to try to minimize that at least. Looking at that kind of proposition there were obviously only two places in the country that seemed to offer terms of this nature — one was Toronto and the other Montreal. And had it been an English speaking country the thought of going to Toronto would I think overwhelm me: it was a publishing centre, it was a musical centre, one of the main centres of the CBC was there. But this was a bi-cultural and bilingual country and it was perfectly obvious that if the Board was going to operate in that framework, it had to be on the line of cultural contact between the two cultures in the country, and in a metropolitan centre which offered the other requirements, so there was only one place to go and that was Montreal, and that's the way I argued myself into this position.

Then the question was how to persuade the Government and everybody else to do this including the Board of Governors. The first thing I did was I drafted quite a long, detailed, memorandum, arguing the pros and the cons (and there were obviously some disadvantages in moving out of Ottawa — the dislocation of staff, the probable reaction from the staff). I took that up with the Board of Governors and with the Minister (Robert Winters) at the same time and they accepted the validity of the case. Then I went to work on the mandarins, the key senior civil servants in Ottawa, people like Bob Bryce, External Affairs Under-Secretary and Norman Robertson, and argued it out with them, usually over lunch, and they all bought it. When this preliminary work had been done, the Minister took a submission to Cabinet, which I wrote, and it was just accepted. It seemed so obvious that very few people at that level questioned it. Incidentally, the Government at the time, had a notion that some functions of the Government should be decentralized and this was a factor in the final decision.

At this point in the original interview Mr. Irwin discusses at some length the technical design of the NFB's building in Montreal.

When the Montreal move was announced to the staff of the Board, again the roof blew off. They were pretty badly shattered. Their families were in Ottawa, it meant moving their families, a new school system, and some of them didn't like the big city. Some of them, frankly, didn't want to leave their nice little safe cocoon, even though it was a hostile cocoon, in Ottawa, and go out into the great big world. Anyway there was a whole gamut of reasons for the reaction but the staff generally were very strongly against the move. There was only one of the senior officials in the Board who thought the idea

made any sense at all — the rest were all opposed and I had to try and persuade them and argue with them. I remember arguing with Don Mulholand, who was then the Director of Production. This was very early in the game and I didn't really know him very well at that time, and we argued and argued, and he was absolutely opposed. I think he thought I was nuts. But finally he came to me one day and said "Look," he said, "I'm opposed to this — I think you're wrong, but if it's policy, if it's your policy and it's government policy and you want it, and you think this is the right thing to do, I'll go with you." From that time on he pitched in and made an enormous contribution to the development of the plans. After I left he was exposed to enormous pressure from the producers who wanted to stop the move, and he submitted a brief to Mr. Trueman, the Film Commissioner who succeeded me, and the producers put in another brief.

There was also a tremendous reaction from the Ottawa community — the community which had derided and despised this Film Board crowd in their midst. Suddenly, the despised pariah became their dearest cultural jewel; the city would be deprived of the cultural centre which was of enormous value to it. The Chamber of Commerce passed resolutions and the City Council discussed it and offered the Government a free site in Ottawa of 27 acres if only the Film Board would stay there. Charlotte Whitton, who was the Mayor, really went to town. She attacked me and she attacked everybody associated with the move — the Government, all the way up the line, and she finally likened the move of the Film Board staff to Montreal to an Expulsion of the Acadians and the Expulsion of the Japanese from the West Coast during the War. I mean, her feeling was just that strong. After I left, the staff went to the Minister, the new Minister, who was Walter Harris (Winters had then gone to Public Works) and it went up to Cabinet again and finally to Mr. St. Laurent himself. He just said, "No. We've made a decision and that's it." From then on there was no question about it.

The Image of the Board

The next stage in terms of public relations and restoring public confidence, was a special all-party committee of the House of Commons and this was in the early spring of 1952. There were twenty-six members on the committee including quite a number of the Board's enemies and we were a bit fearful of what might happen. We spent an awful lot of time on preliminary research preparing for this. The staff was absolutely magnificent. We were trying to assemble data to answer every conceivable question that any member of that committee might ask — to do it in advance, and we worked nights. There was no elevator after five o'clock, and the staff climbed up and down those bloody stairs until they were hungry and tired and exhausted, but they stuck it out, and when we got to the committee we were able to practically answer any question. I read a statement initially and we had also come with a scheme for inviting the whole committee down to the Production facilities on John Street to show them what we were talking about. This worked like a charm. We filmed them as they entered the building, we filmed them as they looked at the various processes and at the end of a film screening we showed them a picture of their looking at the building. This just about bowled them over. They were tremendously impressed and when it came to their final report they gave the Board an unqualified endorsement. Actually they were specific about two

things. They reported that they felt that the Board was playing a vital role in the development of a national consensus in Canada and in projecting the image of Canada abroad, and they commended the Board for having produced a picture called *Royal Journey*, which they said was an important Canadian historical document and a convincing portrait of Canada and its people. That put an end to the criticism of the Board in the House. That year the estimates were passed in fourteen minutes and the following year it was even faster. In other words, there was absolutely no opposition to the Board at all.

The Films

During the tumultuous period which we have been talking about, film production went on, it increased, and I think it can be said with reason that to some extent even quality increased. I don't want to bore you with a lot of figures, but in the three years the Board increased theatrical production films by 87 percent; it more than doubled Canadian theatrical production; it more than tripled the world wide distribution of newsreel content; it increased non-theatrical distribution in Canada by 42 percent and non-theatrical distribution abroad by I think it was 76 percent. And this was all done despite a decrease in the number of staff of 7 percent and an increase of only 17 percent in the gross expenditures. I think that the quality of the films at the peak was very, very high indeed — the average was high. We did produce some relatively poor films, but they were rare. I think this is indicated by what happened in terms of national and international awards. Prior to this period there had been thirteen awards in the previous year and in the last year I was there, there were thirty-three. Included in that were the top British, French, and American awards, in their classes, for the year. There was *Royal Journey*, which was a film on the visit of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip to Canada in 1951 — that won the British Film Academy Award for the best documentary of the year. There was *Romance of Transportation in Canada* which took a Cannes Festival Award for the best animated short of the year. And there was Norman McLaren's *Neighbours* which won a Hollywood Oscar. I think that's a record, which indicates that the quality level of what the Board's output was at that time very, very high. I don't know whether that three-strike business has been matched.

At this point, Irwin describes the production of Royal Journey, especially the decision to use the new Eastmancolor stock and to release it in five reels instead of two.

Twenty-eight days from the end of shooting *Royal Journey* we had the test print. Twelve days later it opened in seventeen first-run theatres in the principle cities from coast to coast in Canada and in two months it had been seen by two million Canadians. Before the end of the run in Canada it had played in twelve hundred and forty-nine theatres and broke all records for attendance of any film produced in Canada up to that time. United Artists took it for the United States, General Films took it for the U.K., Rank took it for the rest of the world outside the western hemisphere; and before it ran its course it had played theatrically or non-theatrically in some forty countries. I personally believe that in terms of the original job of restoring public confidence in the Film Board, that *Royal Journey* possibly contributed more than any other single factor. I can still feel, even after a lapse of twenty three years the sense of pride I felt, and still feel for that matter at having been associated with the men and women who made it. □

the first wave: 1944-53

by pierre véronneau



Weepy melodramas, highly moralistic with curious sado-masochistic overtones, were an important part of Quebec features of the fifties: the cruel story of the battered child in *La Petite Aurore, l'enfant martyre*, elicited a strong public response

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Nineteen commercial, feature films were produced in Quebec between 1944 and 1953. This was an unprecedented development: only two commercial features had been produced in the previous 30 years. (There were also *En pays neuf*, 1934-37, by Maurice Proulx and *A la croisée des chemins*, 1943, by Jean-Marie Poitevin. Both were propaganda films in 16mm made by priests.) And at least 10 more years were to pass before the revival of Quebec fiction production in the 1960's. What happened during this time that gave rise to such a level of production?

It is necessary to begin by recalling that, although the Canadian film business is almost completely a fiefdom of Hollywood and that films are usually released in Quebec in English, there were some individuals who tried to break the infernal circle by importing French language films. A key figure in this was J.A. DeSève who, during the thirties, set about establishing theatres which would programme French language films exclusively. Since Hollywood distributors released few of their films in French, DeSève's principal source of supply was France. Though his company, France Film, he systematically imported about 80 percent of the annual production of the French film industry.

The Second World War cut him off from his sources of supply. But since the public still demanded films in French, DeSève had to keep re-releasing the same pre-War films. One might presume that it was this set of circumstances that encouraged DeSève to try his hand at production and collaborate in the establishment of Renaissance Films. This company, whose executive producer was the Frenchman, Charles Philipp, found a script, hired an "international" director, Fedor Ozep, and some American technicians, and began production of *Le Père Chopin* in August 1944. It was an enormous success on its release April 19th 1945: a four-week run in Montreal in a 2,380-seat theatre. For the first time the public (and the critics) watched characters, a countryside and places that were "ours". This convinced them that this film with its story of two brothers, one a millionaire but lonely, the other poor but happy with his family, was a masterpiece of great value to Quebec culture.

Counting on the success of *Le Père Chopin*, DeSève founded Renaissance Films Distribution (R.F.D.) on April 25th 1945. His first aim was to build a studio comparable to those existing elsewhere. He went therefore, to France to gain the support of Catholics and establish contacts with Abbé Vachet, head of the FiatFilm de La Garenne-Colombes studios and producer of, among others, *Notre-Dame de la Mouise* (in which DeSève invested.)

When he returned to Quebec, R.F.D. announced a share issue of \$520,000. In order to persuade investors of the financial benefits, R.F.D. publicly stressed the success of *Père Chopin*. And for ideological persuasion, R.F.D. stressed the necessity of building a Catholic cinema responsive to the spirit of the Papal Encyclical, *Vigilanti Cura*, and capable of fighting worldly evils (understood principally to be atheism and communism). "Our aim," said DeSève on his return from France in the fall of 1946, "is to create great artistic cinema with a healthy philosophy, a cinema which will call good good



"With *Tit-coq*, the Canadian cinema emerges from the caverns," said René Lévesque, commenting on the film written by and starring Gratien Gélinas

and evil evil." He also announced plans to establish an international Catholic film office in Montreal, plans that Abbé Vachet had promised support in achieving.

Events now moved ahead quickly. A studio was being built in Montreal. Shares were being sold throughout Quebec. The Report to Shareholders (October 21, 1946) stated: "As of October 15th, the Company had 500 shareholders. We anticipate even more since the creation of an international centre for the production of films of Christian inspiration will have to propagate all our teaching: familial, pedagogic, professional, social, political, aesthetic and religious. We are well placed among the most privileged nations and, throughout the world, assets are no better protected than in the province of Quebec, thanks to our population whose religious, hard-working and frugal spirit has shown itself absolutely resilient to all subversive ideas. Now is the time for those here among us with available capital to offer timely aid to healthy businesses that are looking for the means to expand." In order to achieve this, nothing matched the galvanic eloquence of Abbé Vachet who both spoke on radio and gave Sunday sermons during which he invited parishioners to buy Renaissance shares in the Vestry after Mass. Needless to say, the Episcopate gave this project its enthusiastic blessing.

While Vachet busied himself with the "spiritual" side of the campaign and recruiting eminent citizens, DeSève was refur-



Drawing together the values of the church, the close-knit family and the love of the land, *Le Père Chopin* was declared "a master piece of great value to Quebec culture"



Produced in both French and English in 1946, *La Forteresse/Whispering City* cost \$750,000



The interior of the Quebec Productions Studio during the production of *Le Curé de village* (1949)

bishing the Montreal studio and even assisting in the modernization of the Fiat sound studio in which R.F.D. had invested. By mid-March 1947, everything was ready; only scripts were lacking. But, instead of dealing directly with the question of production, yet another project to garner prestige was begun. Abbé Vachet participated in the O.C.I.C. (Office Catholique International du Cinéma) Congress in Brussels where there was extensive discussion of international Catholic collaboration in production and distribution. R.F.D. was living, not in reality, but in dreams and projects — even though, in the fall of 1947, some French technicians from Fiat were brought over. The summer of 1948 passed in the same euphoric state. This time, the dream was to produce in English by engaging two American producers to set up a programme of ten co-productions with Monogram. Nothing came of it, of course. By now, the shareholders were becoming impatient: several years had passed since the company was founded and still no films had been produced.

Meanwhile, DeSève again became the President of France Film and was expelled from his functions with R.F.D. The new Board of Directors then incorporated a new company, Les Productions Renaissance, which produced a feature, *Le gros Bill* (1949) directed by the French filmmaker, René Delacroix. Set in rural Quebec, it tells the story of a love rivalry that gets the whole village excited. This earthy melodrama was supposed to be truly *québécois* in order to compete with international films and to be an example of good cinema. However, the attempt was only moderately successful. Delacroix left immediately for Paris where he began shooting a bilingual co-production, *Docteur Louise* (1949). This was a moralizing melodrama about a young woman doctor in a small French village who is opposed to abortion and preaches the virtues of childbirth. Made especially for French Catholics and Québécois (Catholic by definition, in 1950), this film was inspired (as the publicity put it) "by the Encyclical Casti Connubii in order to pose to human conscience the delicate question of love as it is understood by the Church."

After this highly moral programme, Les Productions Renaissance made one last film in February 1950: *Les lumières de ma ville*. But this time they chose not a rural theme, but a romantic love story set in the world of entertainment. The publicity stressed that it was an entirely French-Canadian film both in its music and its production. It was now necessary to remind the public of its patrimony. But the film's release coincided with the successive bankruptcies of Renaissance Films Distribution and Les Productions Renaissance. The "glorious" adventure of the Catholic cinema in Quebec came to an end, collapsing in a bizarre and almost fraudulent manner. Through a complicated series of manoeuvres, the rights to the four Renaissance films ended up with DeSève's France Film. The studios themselves were to be dismantled several years later.

Paralleling the Renaissance venture, is the story of another studio, Québec Productions. This company was founded in July 1946 and the key figure in its development was Paul L'Anglais, a well-known radio producer. For its first film it not only called on Fedor Ozep again and American technicians but also bought the script in Hollywood and decided to produce it in two language versions using both English and French speaking actors. *La Forteresse/Whispering City* cost \$750,000 (including studio overheads) in 1946. It enjoyed considerable success despite its Hollywood B-movie plot about a shady lawyer,

C'est donc le moment de nous aider dans cet immense travail tant attendu.

Il nous faut \$600,000 pour 1949, somme relativement faible en face de l'importance de notre programme.

"Ne faillissons pas à la tâche"

CINQ MILLE CANADIENS-FRANÇAIS CATHOLIQUES ont fondé "Renaissance" et bâti les studios. — Beaucoup, sans doute, voudront profiter des avantages de cette nouvelle émission.

Une collection de scénarios remarquables a été étudiée et approuvée par l'autorité compétente en vue d'une production d'esprit chrétien. Assurés du bienveillant appui des hautes autorités religieuses et civiles, nous nous sommes mis au travail.

COMPAGNIE FRANCE FILM collabore avec nous et distribue tous nos films au Canada.

LA CONFÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DU FILM, approuvée par le Saint Siège, travaille avec nous à les distribuer dans le monde entier.

Canadiens-français,
nous faisons appel à vous!
Aidez-nous!
Souscrivez!

We mustn't fail at our task! Buy Renaissance shares in the vestry after mass!



Just a few weeks before the final landscaping was finished, the architect's drawing of the finished studio was published



Measuring 60 x 120 x 50 feet high, the Renaissance sound stage was the largest east of Hollywood in 1945



Paul L'Anglais, the key figure in the development of Québec Productions



J. A. DeSève, the rock on which was founded a French speaking Catholic Cinema

an intrepid woman reporter and a young musician entangled in a murder-blackmail mystery.

The consecutive success of two films, *Le Père Chopin* and *La forteresse*, and the building of two modern studios impressed some people in France. One magazine asked "Will Québec become the Hollywood of French cinéma?" and ended with this phrase: "Given the length of time we have spoken in France of a Mediterranean Hollywood, it will be strange to see French language film production settle down on the banks of the St. Lawrence and Canada, part of the British Empire for nearly two centuries, become the world centre for French cinéma." (*Pour vous*, December 1946).

Québec Productions tried to find other international subjects. But nothing materialized. Even its international distributor, Rank, left it in the lurch when it appeared the government would neither legislate support for Commonwealth film productions nor impose a quota in American films. It was forced to change its strategy and opted to produce stories of more local interest. To do so, it turned to the serialized radio dramas that then had an immense popularity. The weekly adventures of the Quebec heroes of these dramas were assiduously followed by a population whose attachment to "québécois" cultural values was one of the only means to resist the national oppression that they lived. For the first film, Paul L'Anglais chose the most popular of all these radio serials: *Un homme et son péché* (A Man and His Sin). This story was set in the 19th century during the period of colonization. The man was called Séraphin and his sin was avarice. This Quebec miser, the mayor of his village, oppresses his wife, the beautiful Donalda who is much younger than he, and tries to exploit everyone around him. Luckily, he has to contend with the curé Labelle, the historical colonizer of the "north" (100km north of Montreal) who is the defender of the oppressed. This saga was planned to result in three films: *Un homme et son péché*, 1948 (the "dictatorship" of Séraphin), *Séraphin*, 1949 (the revenge of the villagers) and *Donalda* — which was never produced. The success of the two films which were produced was unquestionable: the production costs were almost entirely amortized quickly in the Quebec market alone.

Le curé de village, produced after *Un homme et son péché* and before *Séraphin*, drew on the same vein of social "reflection" and national pride. Based also on a popular radio serial, it was again a tableau of village life in which the curé arbitrates conflicts and redresses wrongs, councils lovers, solves everyone's problems and represents goodness, justice and final authority. Given Quebec society at the time, dominated by Catholic ideology and the clergy, it is hardly surprising to discover films in which the priest had something of the appeal of a cowboy in a cassock. It is this same image that appears again in *Le rossignol et les cloches* (1951), another Catholic-village film whose story is a pretext for lyrical inserts by a "golden-voiced" adolescent.

The year before, Québec Productions also extended itself into a France-Canada co-production to be released in both French and English. The aim was to penetrate both the French and Anglo-Saxon markets since the major financial problem for Québec producers was in having to rely on local box office returns to amortize costs. *Son copain*, 1950 (English title: *The Unknown from Montreal*) was directed by the Frenchman Jean Devaivre and featured René Dary, Paul Dupuis and Patricia Roc. The French Centre national de la Cinématographie provided an advance against box-office receipts of two-and-a-half million francs and the film enjoyed a moderately wide

release in France, Canada, and Britain. Nonetheless, although Québec Productions had been more fortunate in their financial affairs than Renaissance, it too had to cease activities. In effect, it was not strong enough to support the production of three features a year which would return enough at the box-office in the short term — and especially not at the point when television was making inroads on movie-going. However, the company did rent out its facilities to other producers, notably to Otto Preminger for the production of *The 13th Letter*.

(The original article at this point has a section on the Canadian Cooperation Project which has been omitted in view of the full article on this topic in this issue.)

With the death of the "big" companies, film production did not automatically come to an end. Small companies were established to produce one or two films. Some of these were in English (*Forbidden Journey*, 1950, and *Butler's Night Off*, 1951) and one was in colour (*Etienne Brûlé: gibier de potence*, 1951). But the genre that aroused the most reaction was the weepy melodrama, highly moralistic with curious sado-masochistic overtones. *Coeur de maman* (1953) is the drama of a mother's trials and tribulations as she is mistreated and humiliated by her eldest son and his wife; only at the end is she rescued by her youngest son. *L'esprit du mal* (1953) is the drama of an avaricious and cruel stepmother who cheats her husband and attempts to marry her step-daughter to the mentally-retarded son of a millionaire. But the girl's lover watches over her and the villains are killed in an accident. Central to the genre is the enormously successful *La Petite Aurore l'enfant martyre* (1951). This is the tale of a cruel stepmother who tortures her ten-year old step-daughter with the complicity of her father who is too weak to protest. Nothing is spared the child: blows, her hair is scorched, her hands are burned on the stove. Only the village priest becomes aware of the situation but too late to prevent the child's death. The mother is hanged.

These three films epitomize the collective morbidity that marked our darkest period, suffocated by Catholic values of penitence, atonement, forbearance and self-sacrifice. These films reflect exactly the sick imagination of our society and are valuable today more for their sociological connotations than for their cinematic qualities. Only one film stands out from this production of the fifties: *Tit-coq* (1953) by Gratien Gélinas. Based on the equally famous and successful play by Gélinas, this film is of value mainly for its script and its acting and less so for its direction which today seems quite pedestrian. Its story of a conscript who loses his girl to another man while he is at war moved René Lévesque (then a critic, now Prime Minister of Québec) to claim: "With *Tit-coq*, the Canadian cinema emerges from the caverns."

Our cinema may have left the caverns but, if so, it was to die in full daylight. The public no longer responded to appeals to pride and recognition. It wanted a quality which was lacking. It no longer felt the need to see the voices it heard on radio serials. Television arrived in 1952 and it played the same role as the films had: from now on the serials found their place on the TV screen. The film companies began to produce series of short films rather than features. Television encouraged a different kind of film industry and at the same time almost entirely absorbed the personnel who had been working in feature production. The Canadian Hollywood wasted ten years. If it gave us no masterpieces, it did provide a series of clear mirrors to reflect our ideological and social history. And if the films make us smile today, it is a wry smile. □

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the indies vs. the chains

canada's theatrical wars

by kirwan cox

GALA OPENING THURSDAY
OLIVER TWIST
PATRICIA ROC TREVOR HOWARD



photo: John C. Lindsey

Patricia Roc and Trevor Howard made guest appearances at the Odeon Carlton Theatre's gala opening of *Oliver Twist* in Toronto

Hollywood has dominated the world's screens since World War I, but that domination has never been so complete as it has been in Canada. Most other countries had a strong cultural tradition which made the absence of native films apparent. Canadians accepted their invisibility docilely.

The obverse side of this coin — Hollywood's unquestioned and unquestioning domination — is Canada's unquestioned and unquestioning submission. By Canada, I refer primarily to politicians and, secondarily, to the exhibitors and distributors who branched into production in other countries for obvious pecuniary reasons. This did not happen in Canada. The "film industry" was an industry of amputation — exploitation of the market without production.

The Rise of N.L. Nathanson

In 1919, the Allens owned one of the largest and most modern chain of theatres in the world. They had a franchise for Famous Player-Lasky Films (distributed by Paramount) which was up for renewal. The Allens had built their chain on the profits from the exclusive right to Paramount's movies in Canada. Paramount's head, Adolph Zukor, was expanding into exhibition and refused to renew the Paramount franchise unless the Allens took him into partnership in their theatre chain. They refused.

Enter N.L. Nathanson who bought his first theatre in 1916 (in Toronto) with the backing of prominent Canadian financiers. In 1923, after a coast to coast building war against the Allens, Nathanson, acting for Zukor's Paramount, bought out the 53-theatre chain for a fraction of the appraised value. Nathanson went on the build Famous Players and acquire more and more first-run options with all of the American movie companies. Nathanson didn't like competition in any form, and broke more than one independent theatre owner as Famous Players grew.

By the late twenties, some "indies" rose up against Nathanson with the help of a prominent Toronto lawyer, Earl Lawson. He pushed for the Combines Investigation in 1930 which reported that Famous Players and the Hollywood companies were, in fact, a combine. A subsequent trial in Ontario acquitted the defendants.

Nathanson's luck changed when he swindled the business partners on his Board of Directors in a stock deal regarding Famous Players shares in 1929. They found out, and kicked him out of Famous Players with Zukor's blessing. He then tried to set up a new chain in partnership with William Fox. He would get the Fox franchise for Canada and repeat the same formula that he used to set up Famous Players with the Paramount franchise — guaranteed access to top quality Hollywood product. Unfortunately for N.L., the stock market crash created problems for Fox and the deal fell through.

After Paramount encountered financial difficulties, Nathanson manoeuvred himself back into Famous Players in 1933 as president. In protest, almost the entire Board quit.

At this time, N.L. Nathanson was at the peak of his power, which ranged from being C.D. Howe's man on the Board of the CBC to running hundreds of theatres and owning the distribution rights to the biggest Hollywood companies in Canada. He also owned a share of the largest production company in Canada, ASN, which made its money doing lab work for Hollywood.

Famous Players was the keystone of this empire. With only 20 percent of Canada's theatres it was reaping about 50 percent of Canada's total box office in 1937. That year single



While children line up for a Saturday matinee, Paul Nathanson and J. Arthur Rank congratulate each other

theatre owners made up 54 percent of total theatres and took in only 29 percent of Canada's total box office gross.¹ The reason was simple: first run product was tied to Famous Players or its subsidiaries.

Without guaranteed access to first-run Hollywood product, a theatre was second or subsequent run and often a marginal operation. As veteran exhibitor Nat Taylor remembers: "There was first run and then no run."² Today, first run revenue accounts for 70 percent of all box office gross.

Nova Scotia vs. Nathanson et al

At this time, a Sydney, N.S. exhibitor (probably W.H. Cuzner), was fed up being a "no run" theatre, and angry with Nathanson's tactic. He convinced Malcolm Patterson, MPP for Cape Breton West, to sponsor a bill making "unfair discrimination" in the allocation of films to theatres a criminal offense. This was the first provincial attempt to regulate distributors and intercede in the exhibition/distribution system on behalf of the independents. It was passed on April 15, 1939 — the last day of that parliamentary session.

Explaining his bill, Patterson said:

"Theatre-goers in Nova Scotia are being compelled to pay into a racket being carried on in Ontario. . . Famous Players is a theatre operating company with a manager named Nathanson in Toronto. . . Nathanson also is head of distributing companies which own and control practically all the important pictures that are shown in this province. In conjunction with the Nathanson distributors, they are today carrying on a system of discrimination against the smaller theatres, and if it continues, the small theatres will have to close and a monopoly will be created.

. . . We can shut off this racket and prevent this man Nath-

anson and Famous Players from taxing the people of this province who attend theatres." ³

He was wrong. Nova Scotia could not beat the film industry. First, Famous Players Vice-President J.J. Fitzgibbons replied:

"Certainly it can't be said, so far as I know, that we are competing unfairly in Nova Scotia, *according to regular theatre operation practice.*" ⁴ (emphasis added)

The film companies blackmailed Nova Scotia into not promulgating the law which had already been passed in the Assembly by threatening a boycott of all Hollywood films in all Nova Scotia theatres. On April 20, five days after the bill was passed, all of the St. John N.B., distribution offices (which handled the Nova Scotia market) were publicly notified by Toronto not to sell any more pictures in Nova Scotia effective once existing contracts ran out. At this time there were 65 theatres in Nova Scotia, a strong indie market until the postwar era.

Next, after the mailed fist — the velvet glove. A delegation from Toronto went to Halifax to meet with the Premier and the independent exhibitors. Hollywood's Canadian lobbyist, Colonel John Cooper, led the group along with two men from Famous Players and the Fox and RKO distributors. The group set up a "conciliation board" with the indies to settle internal industry problems and the indies were apparently satisfied. They got something and Hollywood got something, because the law was not promulgated until the sixties. (It was this law that allowed a Maritime independent to fight the Hollywood system in the mid-seventies. ⁵)

In the end, a provincial government had been successfully intimidated by Hollywood and Nathanson. The threat of a movie boycott was the ultimate weapon Hollywood had, and they were not beyond using it.

The Creation of Odeon

It appears that N.L. had been preparing for his split from Famous Players for some time. He had never really liked being a branch office, although the economics of the movie business seemed to force him into that role. Zukor had sent up two of his men to run Famous Players after Nathanson was fired in 1929 — J.J. Fitzgibbons and R.W. Bolstead.

Nathanson, when he returned to Famous in 1933, told journalist Ray Lewis that he had an "understanding" with Zukor, that he would acquire control of Famous. But Zukor resigned and his successor, Barney Balaban, was committed to no such understanding. ⁶ Fitzgibbons was number two at Famous under Nathanson, but he ran the company according to Paramount practices, which N.L. couldn't undo when he returned in 1933. Fitzgibbons was also a close protégé of Balaban.

In the late thirties, while president of Famous Players, Nathanson began acquiring theatres which were in competition with Famous Players, through a middleman, Oscar Hanson. This personal scheme was discovered and he was forced to sell these theatres to Famous, but he kept working on the side in opposition to his own company.

The result was Odeon Theatres whose nominal head was N.L.'s son, Paul. Paul was in his mid-twenties and had shown little previous interest in the theatre business. Later, Paul claimed that he picked the name Odeon out of the dictionary (it is Greek for "theatre") completely unaware of the

Odeon chain in Britain, which J. Arthur Rank acquired in 1941.

Nathanson's employment contract with Paramount was coming up for renewal in 1941. However, he obviously did not intend to renew it. Perhaps he felt he could do to Famous what he had done to the Allens twenty years earlier: steal their most important Hollywood franchise, build new theatres in opposition, and buy up the pieces that shook loose.

Nathanson could not build a chain of theatres without an exclusive franchise from a least one Hollywood major. The Allens had needed it and went bust without it. Nathanson had needed it to start Famous Players, and he wouldn't start a new chain in the early thirties without it. When he set up Odeon, N.L. claimed he had the MGM franchise.

Nathanson's own distribution company, Regal Films (managed by his brother Henry), had the exclusive franchise for the biggest and best production company of this period — MGM. N.L. told small theatre owners across the country that they would get first run MGM product exclusively if they joined his new chain, Odeon Theatres. This was heady stuff for people who had second run or "no run" houses — the lowly indies. Many signed up.

In other cases, Nathanson used his position as head of Famous to steal theatres out from under that company, since Famous had been built by N.L. as a series of partnerships and holding companies that were incredibly complex. Nathanson began renewing contracts personally, rather than for Famous Players.

Nathanson also simply renewed certain theatre leases for Odeon after they expired. Apparently he did this with a Famous subsidiary called Hamilton United Theatres which owned the Capital and Palace theatres in Hamilton. Taking these theatres wiped Famous out of the center of this city. Famous Players sued Nathanson over the ownership of this company in 1942. ⁷

Nathanson resigned from Famous Players in May 1941 taking with him to Odeon some of Famous Players top staff. These men, such as Tom Bragg and Clarence Robson had been with N.L. from the beginning at Famous Players. At Famous Players J.J. Fitzgibbons took over.

During the next months there were many rumours about who had, or who had not, joined Nathanson and about which Hollywood studios had, or had not, joined Nathanson and about which Hollywood studios had, or had not, signed their franchises over to Odeon. There was a meeting in New York at Nick Schenck's office. (Schenck headed Loew's Inc. which controlled MGM and was then the most powerful man in the movie industry.) Nathanson, Fitzgibbons, Balaban and others, were to decide who got MGM product in Canada. Nathanson lost and Famous kept MGM (and control of the Canadian exhibition market). However, Nathanson didn't come away empty handed. He retained the MGM distribution franchise and Odeon got some of the lesser distributors.

The current president of Famous Players, George Des- tounis, described this split between Odeon and Famous:

"Well, it's been an historical fact that prior to independents, that the major distributors aligned themselves with either one circuit or the other. People like Paramount and Warners and United Artists will play 100 percent Famous and people like Columbia and two thirds Universal and one third Fox would play Odeon. You must bear in mind that in the original setup there were companies like RKO (and)

MGM as we knew it and it was agreed I understand early (in the forties) how the breakdown (worked) when Odeon was first formed." 8

Without MGM, many indies deserted Nathanson. Despite losing the MGM franchise and the wartime building restrictions on new theatres, Odeon expanded because it had some Hollywood and British product and there was a movie theatre shortage as wartime business boomed. Nathanson laid plans for a massive building program after the war, but he died in May, 1943. His son, Paul, was not president, in fact as well as title. Haskwell Masters was made General Manager.

The Indies Rise Again

The formation of Odeon was not the only wartime threat to Famous' supremacy. One change was the control which the Wartime Prices and Trade Board had on the exhibitors' business. If the independents were to avoid being cut out of the decisions the Board's R.C. McMullen was making (and being lobbied to make by Cooper, Fitzgibbons, Nathanson, et al), they also had to become organized and lobby. While the creation of a second national chain by Nathanson had changed the industry's structure, the independents still had to wait for product after these two companies were satisfied.

The result was an aggressive new exhibitor's association in Ontario called the Independent Motion Picture Exhibitors Association. The first meeting was held in the King Edward Hotel, Toronto, in early January, 1942. Over 40 exhibitors who were unaffiliated to the chains attended and elected Barnett E. Lax-

er president. He had the Biltmore theatres in Kingston and Oshawa.

There already existed numerous exhibitors' associations across Canada. Some were dormant, some really represented a single company, some were simply booking agencies, and most were moribund because they included the chains as well as the indies. There chains naturally were satisfied with the *status quo*.

Laxer quickly found out that McMullen didn't want to deal with provincial associations, but only national groups. So the National Council of Independent Exhibitors of Canada was set up to deal with the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. McMullen's importance can be understood because he had already set a ceiling on ticket prices and film rentals and guaranteed that exhibitors would continue to share product on a *pro rata* basis.

Next, Laxer published a 32 page pamphlet dated March 26, 1942, which attacked the industry's market organization and pointed out that the chains and distributors were gradually pushing the independents out of business. The pamphlet, titled "Memorandum of the National Council of Independent Exhibitors of Canada to the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and to James Stewart, its Administrator of Services", charged:

"Independents are being driven out of business at an unprecedented rate, while the surviving ones with good theatres are in danger of extinction.

Finding the avenue of theatre construction closed, the Chains have turned to the independent territory for extension in Canada. The weapon now employed by the Chains



Wishing her "bon voyage", Brockington and Salmon of Odeon salute Dorothy Moreau — Miss Canada — who is off for a screen test for Rank in England



John J. Fitzgibbons, President of Famous Players Canadian Corporation, Canadian theatre chain affiliated with Paramount Pictures, chats on the set of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*

for absorbing Independent theatres is that of taking away their pictures, or as it may be otherwise stated, worsening the product of Independent theaters, by depriving them of the pictures of certain producers, by selecting top bracket pictures, leaving the poorer pictures to the Independents, by taking away their runs of particular producers—in short, by over-buying.

The attitude and conduct of the Distributors and Chain exhibitors appears to be one of disregard of the Government's plan and purpose as shown in its Wartime Prices and Trade Board measures... The seeming intention of the Distributors and Chains is to pursue their business as if no Wartime Board had come into being." ⁹

Citing the Dominion Bureau of Statistics as its source, the memorandum said the growth of chains (defined as four or more theatres under single ownership) went from 18 percent of all theatres in 1930 to about 50 percent of Canada's 1250 theatres in 1942. During this period, total revenue of the chains went from 40 percent to about 75 percent in 1942 (from a total box office of \$38 million).

The reaction to this uprising was incredibly fierce. The Canadian Moving Picture Digest's Ray Lewis said:

"...why, in such a time as this, when all right-thinking men and women are directing their thinking, their man and woman-power towards a War Effort, that a group of motion picture exhibitors should expend energy, time and man-power in kicking the Canadian Motion Picture Industry in the pants, instead of Hitler! . . . We have been told, that since the publication of the pamphlet, some exhibitors have withdrawn from the Ontario group." ¹⁰

The chains were quick to react by setting up a new exhibitors organization to destroy Laxer's group. This time they weren't going to let the indies form their own association, but they would set up one group for all exhibitors. This strategy would keep the indies from organizing against the "system" as Laxer had done.

In September, 1942, the Motion Pictures Theatres Association of Ontario was set up. This association would include chains, and Ray Lewis gave her seal of approval:

"We think it is an excellent idea to form such an association as we are of the opinion that an exhibitor is an exhibitor,

regardless of whether he belongs to a circuit or is operating one or more theatres independently." ¹¹

The MPTAO successfully co-opted the independents who were now finished as an organized and militant political force pursuing their own interests in opposition to Hollywood's interests.

The indies fight against the Hollywood system was also undermined by the rising prosperity in the movie business. Audiences increased 58 percent during the war and even the independents were wealthier than ever. The *status quo* didn't seem that bad to many of these men.

The Odeon-Famous Pool

Despite fears of a postwar depression, or maybe because of them, the pent-up energies and profits of the theatre companies went into a building boom which continued until television paranoia became all-pervasive around 1949-50. Famous Players decided to stress modernization of its large theatre circuit which grew from 327 theatres in 1944 to 383 in 1949. Odeon decided they would buy or build new theatres to catch up with Famous. Between 1946 and 1951 in Ontario alone, the number of theatres in operation increased by 36 percent. Some of these were modern palaces while other's were little more than rural quonset huts.

While Odeon and Famous Players appeared to compete for theatre locations, they were actually eliminating competition between themselves. This pooling of the major chains seemed to disturb the American distributors more than the now-emasculated indies. The following report was in *Variety* in 1946:

"An 'entent cordial' between Famous Players-Canadian and Odeon, Canada's two top theatre circuits, has been set up to eliminate competitive bidding for product, according to indications reaching major U.S. distribs. With Canadian b.o.s. strong, the circuits have discovered, it is said, that there was considerably more profit to be made by not pushing up prices for product by bidding against each other. . . Arrangement—tacit or otherwise—between Odeon and FPC has come to light with efforts of U.S. companies to make deals on their product. They have discovered, they say, that if Odeon refuses a contract because of terms and a sale is then attempted to FPC, the answer is automatically a nix. And vice versa.

With Canadian rentals so satisfactory and apparently nothing to be gained by any public squawk against the alleged Odeon-FPC entents, major distribs are just swallowing their annoyance and keeping quiet. No action of any sort is planned." ¹²

The pool was denied by Toronto distributors, ¹³ but it is hard to imagine people admitting that they were breaking the law, or that their biggest customers were breaking the law. And at this time, Hollywood had enough trouble in the U.S.

In 1948 there were 20,000 U.S. theatres (compared to about 1,500 in Canada) and Loew's (MGM), Fox, Paramount, RKO, and Warners owned 3,000. However, these theatres (15 percent of the total) accounted for 45 percent of all of Hollywood's film rentals in American. This 45 percent was enough to "control" the market according to the U.S. Justice Department. In 1948, the large Canadian chains (20 or more theatres) controlled 22 percent of Canada's theatres and 59 percent of the box office. Of course, the Anti-combines Investigation unit could not find a problem in Canada and Famous Players was not affected by the U.S. decision against Paramount. ¹⁴

After the U.S. anti-trust decision in 1948, which split the theatres from the majors, Canadian independent exhibitors began to get ideas again, which *Variety* reported:

"Indie exhibs, meanwhile, are starting to squawk over the alleged monopolistic practices of the major distribs. They claim they are being frozen out of first run product. Odeon and Famous Players circuits, it's charged, take the cream of the pix before they are given a chance to bid on product. An indie in Victoria alleged he can only buy what the major exchanges can't slough off on the big circuits.

Only major distributing company without theatre tieups is United Artists on whose product J. Arthur Rank's Odeon circuit has first call. Indie exhibs are pressing for an anti-trust suit along the lines of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision of theatre divestiture. However, there would have to be a major investigation before any actual governmental steps were taken." 15

Rank Buys Odeon

Paul Nathanson and Rank were rumored to be negotiating as early as four months after N.L.'s death. Finally, in December, 1944, Rank and Paul Nathanson announced they were 50-50 partners in General Theatre Corp. Ltd. which controlled Odeon of Canada (about 100 theatres by that time). Paul Nathanson retained control of management and his other film interests in distribution, etc., were unaffected by this deal.

Suddenly, in 1946, Paul Nathanson retired at the age of 31 for health reasons, and he sold his 50 percent share to Rank for a rumored \$2 million. He said his father had always wanted to set up an Empire-wide theatre circuit and the sale to Rank helped carry that design forward.

With Rank in control, J. Early Lawson was appointed president. Rank had decided he wanted a man of some power and influence running Odeon rather than simply an old theatre hand. Lawson had had a longtime interest in the movie business as the lawyer for independents who sought Nathanson's monopoly in the late twenties, and later as N.L. Nathanson's lawyer. However he was a prominent figure and had been a member of the Federal Conservative cabinet under Bennett and an M.P. until 1940 when he retired from the House.

Rank, of course, called the shots and John Davis made an annual trip to Canada to oversee the operation which looked increasingly like it would encompass film production.

Odeon Wants a Quota

Rank had long-range plans for feature film production in Canada, or at least he gave that impression. The *Canadian Film Weekly*, reported that feature production in Canada was definite and Rank was looking for a story. 16 He wanted Commonwealth production to add "realism." At this time, Rank said he planned to make 35 features budgeted at £8 million in 1947.

These plans ended when the British Government put a 75 percent Ad Valorem tax on film rentals of foreign films in England. Mindful of the Canadian branch plant quota films of the thirties, Commonwealth movies were put in the foreign category. The result was that Rank's studios overseas were shut down. This included South Africa and Australia as well as Canada. *Variety* reported that Queensway Studio in Toronto was at a standstill except for sponsored films. 17 Four low-budget features which had been planned were shelved.



The porter of the Dorchester Hotel calls a taxi for the Hon. and Mrs. J. Earl Lawson, in London for a few week's stay

Hollywood retaliated by boycotting the British market and British films were regularly picketed in the U.S. Rank had always had trouble getting access to the U.S. market, and this compounded those problems.

During this period, Earl Lawson tried to get Ontario to set up a quota for British (and Canadian) feature films. He suggested 10 percent of the films shown with exceptions for theatres which changed programs three times a week, but not lower than 5 percent.

Lawson concentrated on Ontario because it already had a provision in its Theatre Act for a British quota which could be set by order-in-council. Also, along with the 75 percent tax, Britain had raised the quota for British pictures from 17 1/2 percent to 45 percent. Before it was raised, Rank theatres in U.K. averaged 30 percent British playing time and other theatres average 20 percent. Lawson said that in 1948, Rank's theatres played 55-60 percent British screen time.

In a memorandum dated August 26, 1948, and addressed to Premier Leslie Frost, Lawson pointed out why a quota was

"Aside from the people of this province being strongly British in sentiment and therefore, by an overwhelming majority, would favour a quota, the national interest of Canada would be served:

(a) By increasing the number of Canadian dollars remitted to the United Kingdom, thus enabling the United Kingdom to buy more agricultural and manufactured products from Canada, and

(b) By automatically curtailing the demand for U.S. dollars for remittance of film rentals to the United States.

The Ottawa Journal or Citizen some time ago had an editorial or special article in which it was stated that a 20 percent quota nationally on British and French pictures would do more to remedy the shortage of U.S. dollars than all the cooperation and collaboration between the Minister Hon. Mr. Howe and the U.S. Film Producers and Distributors. With that statement we entirely agree."

He knew the plan would not be without opposition, but added:

"If the above suggestions are adopted we are firmly convinced that there will not be justifiable complaints from exhibitors, and particularly from the independent exhibitors. The introduction of any quota law will naturally bring pro-

tests from the large circuits of theatres."

There is a certain irony in all of this: a former Conservative cabinet minister arguing for a quota; the second largest exhibitor (and largest British producer at that time) saying the government should interfere in the market; and all of this from the company which since then and over the years has argued strenuously against a quota for Canadian films and recently said it sold its Canadian theatres because of the possibility of legislation such as a quota. Self-interest has never been a consistent ideology.

At any rate, Ontario Censor O.J. Silverthorne was asked to comment on this proposal. He said British pictures were good and less violent than American pictures (an increasing concern of the Ontario board at that time); they were popular, it was patriotic to support them; and a quota was feasible because it was already in the Act. The memo stated flatly: "A quota established for the benefit of British pictures appears to be desirable..."

He adds:

"It is safe to assume that any opposition to a quota will be inspired by the American motion picture interests. It is believed that the present administration would secure a lot of credit for initiating a quota." 18

Silverthorne was in favour of a quota pure and simple. On January 17, 1949, Frost wrote a memo to the deputy minister, Dr. C.S. Walters, which said:

"I wish you would get Mr. Silverthorne and go over this file and let me have your joint recommendation as to the following:

1. Is it desirable that there should be a quota?
2. If so, what percentage should there be of British films?
3. Any other points which you think are material.

I am most anxious to consider this matter the last week of this month, and if you would kindly go over the same and let me have your joint recommendations we can then give the matter consideration."

At this point, a headline appeared in *Canadian Film Weekly*: "Quota Talk Bunk, Says Ottawa." Ottawa turned out to be A.H. Newman, liaison officer for the Canadian Cooperation Project 19 and at this time pliant to MPAA suggestions. He could hardly make Government policy, but he said:

"The Canadian Government would be very pleased to see as many British films used in Canada as possible — and, for that matter, films from any other European nation. But no steps will be taken to discriminate against the films of any nation." 20

It has turned out that part of his job was to see that the CCP was not threatened. And any action against U.S. pictures was a threat. A classic case of co-option of the regulator by the regulatee. In the same article, the *Canadian Film Weekly* polled exhibitors about a quota and said "In every case exhibitors were vigorously opposed to being told what to play."

The Americans were fighting back. On February 11, 1949, Silverthorne reversed his earlier memo and argued against a quota. His first memo had been four pages long in favour, now he could find only one page of arguments against:

"Up to this date quotas have not been fixed under our Act because of the fact it has always been held that this is purely a Federal matter..."

The fixing by one single Province of a quota on British pictures, might under present condition, result in injury to the British film industry for the reason that powerful factions opposed to British films might select the most mediocre of British features for the sole purpose of bringing these subjects into disfavour with the theatre going public.

In view of the foregoing, we would advise that no action be taken in this matter as we believe that this whole idea of quotas is a Federal affair."

Dr. Walters wrote in the corner: "I am in substantial agreement with the views expressed herein." Why did Silverthorne reverse himself and why was the Federal canard dragged out when the legislation was already in place in Ontario? The power of Hollywood over the Canadian political process was once again quietly demonstrated.

Lawson died May 13, 1950, at the age of 58. He was succeeded by the eminent lawyer and former CBC Chairman, Leonard Brockington, but Brockington did not have Lawson's energy or knowledge of the film business.

In fact, Lawson's death, combined with the collapse of Rank's English production operation from Hollywood pressure as well as the advent of television, ended Odeon's expansive period. The theatre chain seemed destined to remain Famous Players' junior partner in the exploitation of Canada's movie market. Still, that was better than being a "no run" indie.

The Nathanson Legacy

The theatre system N.L. Nathanson set up during his lifetime has changed remarkably little in the years since. The circuits he started, Famous Players in 1920 and Odeon in 1941, are still dominant; still connected to the Hollywood distributors in roughly the same manner N.L. left them; and even run by many of the same people. The independents still have a raw deal and still (with the odd exception) accept it. If he were still alive, it is hard to imagine that N.L. would have let things stay in such a rut for so long. □

1. *Canadian Film Weekly*, December 1, 1948 (CFW)
2. Interview with Author.
3. *Variety*, April 5, 1939
4. *Variety*, April 5, 1939
5. "Rocca's Big Fight," *Cinema Canada* no. 25
6. *Canadian Moving Picture Digest*, June 5, 1943 (CMPD)
7. The young J.J. Robinette defended Nathanson in this case which dragged on after N.L. died and after Rank bought Odeon. Finally the suit was dismissed without costs on the consent of all parties concerned in December, 1948. The theatres apparently remained with Odeon.
8. Interview on CBC's "Home Movies," telecast March 17, 1976
9. *CFW*, August 19, 1942
10. *CMPD*, August 22, 1942
11. *CMPD*, September 19, 1942
12. *Variety*, April 10, 1946
13. *CFW*, April 24, 1946
14. *The Anti-Trust Bulletin*, Spring, 1975
15. *Variety*, June 29, 1948
16. *CFW*, May 28, 1947
17. *Variety*, September 2, 1947
18. Silverthorne Memo, September 7, 1948
19. "The Majors and the Mandarins," *Cinema Canada* no. 22
20. *CFW*, February 2, 1949

FILM REVIEWS

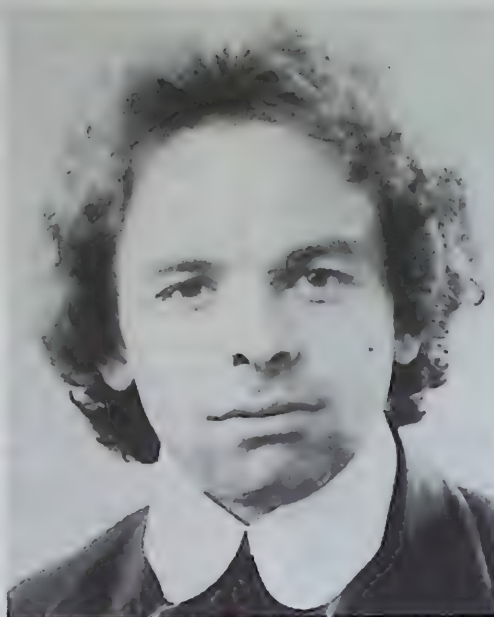
George Bloomfield's Riel

d. George Bloomfield, sc. Roy Moore, ph. Vic Sarin sp. ph. effects Doug Wardle ed. Myrtle Virgo neg. cutting Rose Wyatt sd. Gerald King sd. ed. Lock Johnston, Kevin Townshend sd. re-rec. Len Abbott set dec. Bill Beeton, m. William Macaulay, cost. Margaret Laurent, make up Pat Harshaw, l.p. Raymond Cloutier, Christopher Plummer, Roger Blay, William Shatner, Arthur Hill, Leslie Nielson, Don Harron, Barry Morse, Lloyd Bochner, Paxton Whitehead, John Neville, Jean-Louis Roux, Marcel Sabourin, Don Francks, August Schellenberg, Brenda Donohue, Gary Reineke, Kenneth Welsh, Chris Wiggins, Claude Jutra, exec. p. Stanley Colbert, p. John Trent p.c. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in association with Green River Pictures (1978) col 16mm running time 142 minutes, 52 seconds and 19 frames.

As the Canadian film industry leaps with joyous tax dollars into the dull maw of the US B-movie drive-in market, obediently following American directions and the British example and freeing Californian producers to work on more prestigious films, our television industry and the CBC in particular are being left with the responsibility of forging serious entertainment from the Canadian experience. The BBC's example shows that this is not necessarily the tragedy some TV critics would think it to be. The BBC has brought more prestige and honor to Britain than its film industry ever did. But this shift does force film critics to consider television with new seriousness.

It would have been hard to ignore CBC's two part movie *Riel*. Thanks to CBC's refreshing commitment to a major promotional campaign, the name *Riel* was everywhere. From the National News downwards, *Riel* was sold as Canada's answer to *Roots*, *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Joan of Arc* rolled into one: our very own myth to stir the blood and sell T-shirts by.

With consistent intelligence, *Riel* has taken a rather murky figure from our past and made dramatic sense from the shadows. For the first time Canadians have become involved in the ma-



Raymond Cloutier's gripping portrayal of Louis Riel brings authentic realism to film

chinery of modern myth making and, for this, *Riel* is well worth the \$2.2 million it cost. The film is a brave and important step for the CBC. Yet as a piece of drama that has chosen to stand against the best of American television, the imported BBC series and the many Hollywood Westerns it brings to mind, *Riel* must stand as a film as well as a cultural event.

For years the CBC has worked almost exclusively within the field of social realism inherited from Europe. Programs such as *For the Record* are born from a romantic positivism, seeing reality as a skein of observable facts to be rearranged both to heal national ills and to entertain. Success was dependent on the passion of the

writing. Success was rare. Not that many Canadians noticed, because we were busy watching American television and movies, where action is used to transcend reality and the producer's ability to mythologize the American experience is all that matters. With Roy Moore's inventive script, producers Stan Colbert and John Trent set out to create a *Riel* within this myth making tradition. Unfortunately, the director George Bloomfield didn't or couldn't.

Myth making takes passion and Bloomfield's direction lacks it. The film feels cramped, busy with details but hollow emotionally. Bloomfield risks so little that we are unable to empathize with the bravery of *Riel*'s actions. Despite fine performances the film does not reach out to grab us until it is too late.

Our first view of *Riel* (Raymond Cloutier) is a classic Western opening. Riding home after years spent studying in Montreal, this lone horseman is the returning son now prepared to right ancient wrongs. Bloomfield chooses however to bleed all mythical power from the scene, hurrying, in mid-shot to get to a fussy bit of business as *Riel* robs a Metis cache. More perversely he never shows us the landscape *Riel* is so thankful to be returning to. The robbery is interrupted by enraged Metis led by Dumont (Roger Blay), and as *Riel* and a rider roll to the ground — first in anger and then in joyful recognition — the scene takes on the power of a rather dull gymkhana.

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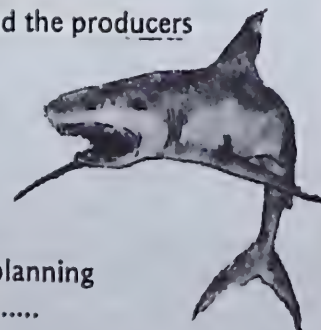
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FILM REVIEWS

Riel is back among friends, not a man apart shaped by some heroic quality but, like Dumont who looks on dyspeptically, as scruffy Everyman.

The half-hearted staging of a later symbolic arm-wrestling match between Riel and Dumont confirms Bloomfield's realistic approach. The written scene cries out for the physical intensity of a Scorsese or Cimino and instead is treated with restrained good taste and immediately slips from the memory. A lovely and moving scene in which Riel emerges from a night's religious vigil to tell waiting Metis of his decision to join their struggle and a single slow pan revealing Metis at last physically halting the aggrandizement of a racist settler (a fine performance by Gary Reineke) give us a glimpse of the emotional power there could have been.

Without visual grandeur the story has been reduced. With no strong sense of the land and life that drew the Metis to rebel, their fight becomes one of personalities. This same directorial restraint places more weight on the rather pedestrian dialogue than it can bear. The intelligence and drive that must have made the young Riel a man apart from his Metis friends becomes an accident of book-learning. The brute force and craft that made Dumont the leader of the hunt and, later, a skillful soldier becomes an ability to shoot down flying whisky bottles.

Without a firm sense of community or cause, much of *Riel* floats in a no-man's land, yet the very core of the story is the physical and emotional distance separating Riel from Macdonald's Ottawa. Without a heroic protagonist John A. becomes the stock Western politician, fraudulent and grasping, and Christopher Plummer, battling with the lines like a petulant John Wayne, is mostly as dull as that Prime Minister no doubt really was. Only in fine scenes with the fiercely political Bishop Bouget (Jean-Louis Roux) does Plummer's bland ruddiness and Roux's tight lipped pallor give the muted clashes of will sudden depth, and the film leaps alive with racial and religious tensions far

beyond the words.

Raymond Cloutier is not as lucky. Deprived of a setting in which to appear heroic, his sensitive acting becomes variations on too small a theme. Without space Riel is also without depth. We never believe in this man's God, for instead of being seen as a source of strength — a voice supporting him through the loneliness of leadership — faith is shown as some sort of fever to be used to explain away irrational, if historical, acts. Joan of Arc has become a hysterical legal clerk. We believe in Cloutier's Riel but are not moved by him. By the time we reach his powerful and moving final speech it is too late, and the trial and execution have the calming inevitability not of fate but of a historical essay being rounded out.

Well before these scenes, the early lack of emotional power has taken its toll. A rather silly scene where murderous Canadians chase the newly elected Manitoba M.P. Riel from Parliament and a later narrative confusion bring the first broadcast limping to a close: William Macaulay's music being required to suddenly make us believe in both the heroic and visionary Riel.

With the second broadcast, history has taken over and the bulk of the film is spent on the battles of Fish Creek, Duck River and Batoche. Except for the famed thin-red-line having shriveled to a rather emaciated clump, the production is excellent. But it provokes a rather abstract excitement for, without a strong dramatic drive, the battles lack definition and blend into each other in pleasant chaos. As Dumont and Riel creep ignominiously from their last defeat, I was left dreaming unpatriotically of Ford, Peckinpah and even Peter Watkins.

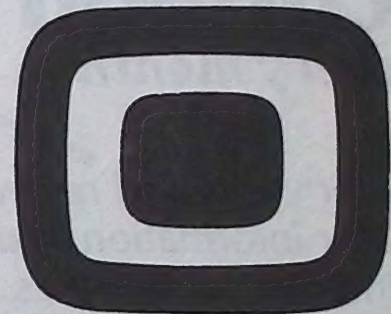
While I wish that somehow the bravery that went into getting this film made and promoted had also carried over into the film itself, *Riel* is an important success. Television, as Colbert has said, "is a producer's art," and with Trent he has proved it can be done — this facing the colonization of our imagination with myths of our own. *Riel* is just the beginning.

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Erratum

Photographers are becoming the invisible people at Cinema Canada, and we apologize. Chris Rensing, a student at Concordia University, took the photo used on the cover of Cinema Canada, issue no. 54. Ron Watts deserved credit for the Title Shot photos in issue no. 55 rather than for the Summer's Children for which he was erroneously credited. He also took the strike shot used on page 1 of CinéMag, no. 18. And talking about CinéMag, Lois Siegel took the pictures of Michael McCabe, Harold Greenberg and David Novek in issue no 17 and the shot of Running, used on page 1 of no. 14.



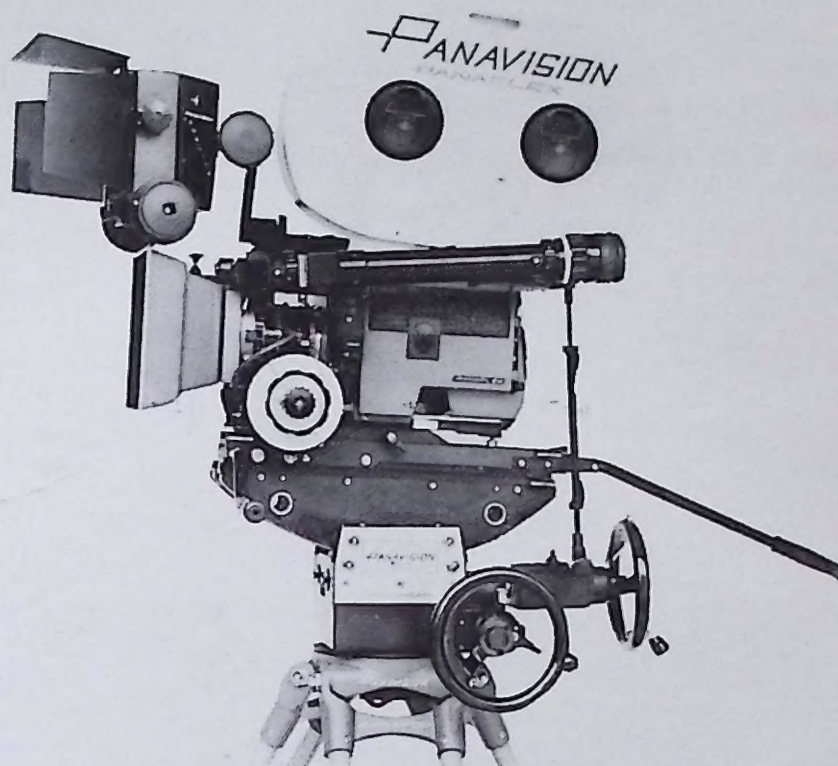
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Arri/Nagra	9
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Canada Council	24
Canadian Film and Television Association	inside cover
Derek Smith Ltd.	56
Editors Cut Ltd.	54
Film Arts	55
Film Opticals	5
Mako Films Ltd.	54
Motion Picture Guarantors Inc.	56
Ontario Arts Council	9
PFA Labs	2
Panavision	57
Proparms	5
Sonolab	58
Spot Labs	6
Syncro Sound	56
Trainco Talent	8

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